

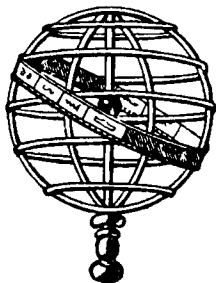
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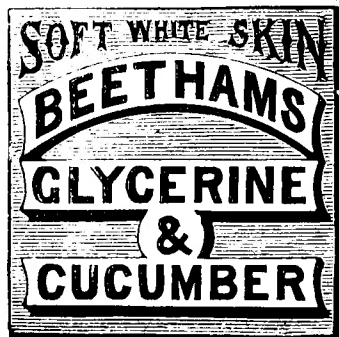
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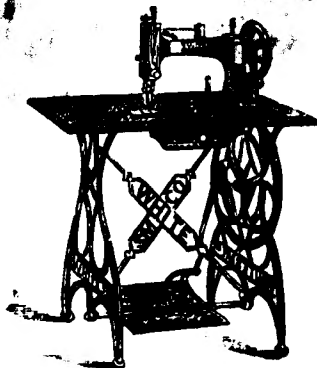
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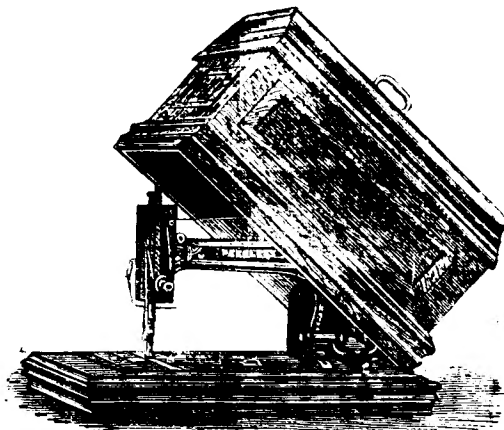
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LOST SIR MASSINGBERD.

PREFATORY.

IN these days, when every man and woman becomes an author upon the least provocation, it is not necessary to make an apology for appearing in print. Perhaps there was always something affected in those prefatorial justifications ; although they did disclaim any literary merit, it is probable that the writers would have been indignant enough had the critics taken them at their word ; and perhaps the publication was not entirely owing to “the warmly-expressed wishes of numerous friends.” But, at all events, we have done with all such excuses now. Not to have written anything for the press, is no small claim to being an Original. Neither sex nor age seems to exempt from the universal passion for authorship. My niece, Jessie (*ætat.* sixteen), writes heartrending narratives for the “Liliputian Magazine ;” her brother, whom I have always looked upon as a violent, healthy hobbledohoy, whose highest virtue was Endurance, and whose darkest experience was Skittles, produces the most thrilling romances for the “Home Companion.” Even my housekeeper makes no secret of forwarding

her most admired recipes to the "Family Intelligencer;" while my stable-boy, it is well known, is a prominent poetical contributor to the "Turf Times," having also the gift of prophecy with reference to the winner of all the racing events of any importance. And yet, I believe, my household is not more addicted to publication than those of my neighbours.

What becomes of authors by profession in such a state of things literary as this, I shudder to think; I feel it almost a sin to add one more to the long list of competitors with whom they have to struggle; but still, if I do not now set down the story which I have in my mind, I am certain that, sooner or later, my nephew will do so for me, and very likely spoil it in the telling. He writes in a snappy, jerky, pyrotechnic way, which they tell me is now popular, but which is not suited to my old-fashioned taste; and although he dare not make, at present, what he calls "copy" of the stories with which I am perhaps too much accustomed to regale his ears, he keeps a note-book, and a new terror is added to Death from that circumstance. When I am gone, he will publish my best things, under some such title as "After-Dinner Tales," I feel certain; and they will appear at the railway book-stalls in a yellow cover bordered with red, or with even a frontispiece displaying a counterfeit and libellous presentment of his departed relative in the very act of narration. The gem of that collection would undoubtedly be the story which I am now about to anticipate the young gentleman by relating myself. If I am somewhat old-world in my style, perhaps it may be forgiven me, in consideration of the reality of the circumstances narrated, and the

very strong interest which I do not doubt they will arouse.

It is not necessary to state the exact locality where they occurred, nor the number of years which have elapsed since their occurrence; it is enough to premise that what I tell is true, and that some of the principal personages in the—well, the melodrama, if you will—are yet alive, and will peruse these words before they meet the public eye. If nothing therein offends *them*, therefore it need not, upon the score of indiscreet revelation at least, offend my readers.

CHAPTER I.

GIANT DESPAIR.

IN a midland county, not as yet scarred by factories, there stands a village called Fairburn, which, at the time I knew it first—many, many years ago—had for its squire, its lord, its despot, one Sir Massingberd Heath. Its rector, at that date, was the Rev. Matthew Long; and at the Rectory, when my story commences, there was in pupilage to the said rector a youth, one Peter Meredith, who has since grown up to be the present writer. When we are small, all things seem vast to our young minds; good men are saints, and evil ones are demons. I loved Mr. Long, therefore, although he was my tutor; and oh, how I feared and hated Sir Massingberd! It was not, however, my boyhood alone that caused me to hold this man as a monster of iniquity; it was the opinion which the whole county entertained of him, more or less. The people of Fairburn trembled before him, as a ship's company before some cruel captain of fifteen years back—I mean, of fifteen years before the period of which I write. Press-gangs had not very long ceased to do their cruel mission; there were old men in our village who had served their time in his Majesty's ships, very much against their will; there were gaps in poor families still, which might or might not be filled up; empty chairs that

had so stood for a score of years perhaps, waiting for still expected occupiers ; fathers of families, or the props of families, in sons and brothers, had been spirited away from Fairburn (even a little while ago), and had not come back again yet. They had been poachers, or radicals, or sectaries (as Dissenters were then called), or something else distasteful to Sir Massingberd's father, and they had been carried off to sea at his command. Let not my young readers imagine that I am exaggerating matters ; I write of a state of things of which they have not the remotest conception, but which I remember perfectly well. They have reason to thank Heaven that they did not live in those times, if they happen to belong to those unprosperous classes which were then termed collectively "the mob;" there were no such things as "skilled workmen," or "respectable artisans," in those days. The "people" were "the Great Unwashed." To build a Crystal Palace for such as they were held to be, would have seemed to be the height of folly; they would have taken no other pleasure in it than to smash every pane with brickbats, for were they not "the dangerous classes"? Such opinions were beginning to die out, indeed; but they were held still by many great people, and Sir Massingberd Heath was one of them. Reared in a clergyman's family, and a clergyman myself, I have been a Conservative in politics all my life, and in that belief I shall die; but rank and power are no excuse with me for evil deeds. In the chamber of my nephew John, who "takes in everything," as the phrase goes, I once discovered a democratic magazine, edited by a gentleman whose surname I forget, but who had a

great multitude of initials. All the poor people described in this work were pious and moral, and all the rich people were infidel and profligate; but for the noblemen—and there were a good many persons of high rank in the various stories—were reserved all the choicest invectives and most superlative abuse. Nothing, of course, can be more unfair than this treatment of a class of persons who, considering their temptations, are really more than respectable. As a general rule the portraits were extravagantly malicious, but they had this attraction for me—they were all exceedingly like Sir Massingberd Heath. He was the very type of that bloated aristocracy that is held up in scarecrow fashion by republican writers. There were not many living specimens to be met with even at the date of my tale; and the old baronet, perhaps himself perceiving that he was one of the last of them, determined that he should not be the least in infamy. Like the Unjust Judge, he neither feared God nor regarded man; and, worse than he, he would not perform a good action on account of the importunity of any person. She must have been a brave woman who importuned Sir Massingberd Heath, and could scarcely have been brought up in Fairburn.

Whether George IV was king or not, at the period of which I write, it matters not, for his connexion with our squire had terminated years before; but at one time they had been fast, very fast friends. When a king and a baronet run a race of extravagance the king generally wins; and so it had been in this case. His Majesty, or rather His Royal Highness the Regent, had *distanced* Sir Massingberd,

and they were not now even upon speaking terms. Friendships of this sort do not last when one of the parties has spent all his money. What was the use of a poor man at White's, who could only look on while his old friends played whist for one hundred pound points, and five hundred pounds upon the rubber? What business, let alone pleasure, could one have in London, when Howard and Gibbs would not lend one fifty pounds even at fifty per cent.? Sir Massingberd had left that gay, wicked world for good, that is to say for ever, and was obliged to live at his beautiful country-seat in spite of himself. He was irretrievably ruined, so far as his court prospects were concerned, for he had no ready money. He owned all Fairburn, and many hundreds of rich acres about it, beside the Park and the river; he had the great tithes of the place, and manorial rights (which he exercised, too) innumerable. Nobody quite knew—he did not know himself—what privileges he had or had not, what pathways he could close at pleasure, what heriots he could demand, or what precise property he had in Fairburn gravel-pits, but in all cases he gave himself the benefit of the doubt. It was a very foolish thing to leave any disputed point to the sense of justice, or the good feeling of our squire, and yet this was generally done. Where it was not done, where some honest fellow had ventured to oppose his high prerogative, even though he gained his end, he was always, as the village people said, “paid out” for it. I don't mean to say Sir Massingberd murdered him—although he would have done that, I am confident, without the slightest scruple, if it could have been effected with safety to himself—

but he took his revenge of him sooner or later, in a very simple way. He caught his children trespassing—having caused them to be enticed upon his land—and committed them to prison; or he broke down his fences, and spoiled his corn in the night; for he had dependents devoted to his wicked will, and upon whose false witness he could always rely.

And yet, with all this power, the baronet, as I have said, was a poor man; he had borrowed all the money he could, and was even said to have overreached the London Jews in these transactions; and it was all gone—absolutely all. It was seldom that this great lord of acres had a ten-pound note in his pocket, for his house and land were all entailed upon his nephew Marmaduke, and he had only a life-interest in anything. Poverty perhaps made him bitterer and more savage than he would otherwise have been; but, for my part, I cannot imagine him to have been agreeable under any circumstances. I have heard, however, that at Carleton House he was once the first favourite—after Brummel—and that, of course, made him sought after by many people. He had a wicked wit, which was doubtless acceptable in some circles, and his tongue, it may be, was not quite so coarse in those days of prosperity. He took a delight in his old age in retailing his infamous experiences, before women, if possible, and if not, before clergymen or boys. I remember to have heard of Mr. Long once venturing to reprove his squire upon an occasion of this very kind. The rector had been dining at the Hall—an exceptional occurrence, and under exceptional circumstances—when, after dinner, the host began one of his disgraceful reminiscences, whereupon my tutor rose

and said, "Sir Massingberd, you should be ashamed to talk of such matters to me; but before this boy, it is infamous. I thank you for your hospitality; but I shall go home."

"Very well; go, and be hanged!" replied the baronet; "and Marmaduke and I will make a jolly night of it."

Marmaduke Heath was Mr. Long's pupil as well as myself, and he resided with his uncle at the Hall. He would very much rather have retired with his tutor on that occasion, and indeed have resided at the Rectory, for he dreaded his relative beyond measure. All the pretended frankness with which the old man sometimes treated the boy was unable to hide the hate with which Sir Massingberd really regarded him; but for this heir-presumptive to the entail, this milk-and-water lad of seventeen, the baronet might raise money to any extent, nay, sell all Fairburn, if he chose, and so might once more take his rightful station in the world, rejoin the Four-in-hand Club, and demand his "revenge" from my Lord Thanet at *écarté*. He could still drink, for the cellars of Fairburn Hall were well-nigh inexhaustible; but if that chit of a lad was but carried off, he might have the best in the land to drink with him. It is true that a ruined man in Sir Massingberd's position can still afford a good table; game is plentiful with him, and fish, and he grows his own mutton and venison, so that neither himself nor his friends need starve; but servants must be maintained to wait upon these, and a great country-house without a carriage is as a lobster without a claw. Consequently, except in the shooting season, there were no guests at Fairburn Hall. The folks that did come were men

of a certain stamp, current indeed in good society, but only in that of males. A real lady had not set foot in the Park, far less the house, for the last twelve years; the manner in which Sir Massingberd lived forbade such a thing. A few bachelors of the County Hunt, and half a dozen roués from town, were all the company that could be enticed to Fairburn in September and October. All the rest of the year the grass grew in the avenue untouched by wheel or hoof, and even sprang up among the stone steps that led to the front door. Somehow or other I never saw it thus without thinking of the parable of the Sower and the Seed, with some distant and uncharitable reference to our squire! I wondered whether it was possible that in any far-back time any good seed of any sort had found its way into the crannies of his stony heart, and if so, what had become of it. I used to try and picture that violent wicked man as a child in his cot, or saying his prayers at his mother's knee. I believe she had died soon after her marriage; and that, short as her wedded life had been, it was a very unhappy one.

Fairburn Hall had never been a house for tender, honest women. The Heaths, who are celebrated, like another noble race of the same sort, for their hard hearts and excellent digestions, had never been good husbands. Fortunately, daughters were rare in the family. How Sir Massingberd would have brought up a daughter, I shudder to think. One son had been the sole offspring vouchsafed to the baronets of this line for many generations, except the last; and in the present case there was no such direct heir. Some said Sir Massingberd had married secretly, but was

separated from his wife, and some said he had not; but it seemed somehow certain that with him the immediate successor from father to son would cease. His brother Gilbert had married young in Italy, and had died in that country within the same year. His widow had brought his posthumous child, when a few months old, to the Hall, at the invitation of Sir Massingberd, and had remained there for some time. The villagers still spoke of the dark foreign lady as being the most beautiful creature they had ever beheld; the Park keepers used to come upon her in solitary glades, singing sweetly, but, ah! so sorrowfully, to her child in a tongue that they did not understand. The baronet himself was absent, not yet cast out of the court whirlpool, and the lonely vastness of the place was not displeasing to the young widow, wishing, perhaps, to be left undisturbed with her grief; but after Sir Massingberd came down, she remained but a very few days. It was said that she fled with her babe in a winter's night, and that her little footprints were traced in the snow to the cross-roads where the mail went by, by which she had arrived. She was not rich, and had come down in a manner quite different from that of her brother-in-law, who, broken and ruined though he was, had posted with four horses. That was how all gentlefolks of the county travelled in those days. Even the very barristers on circuit indulged, and were obliged to do so, in a chaise and a pair. The mother of Marmaduke Heath, however, who was heir-presumptive to the largest landed property in Midshire, was very poor. Whether the late baronet had omitted to make a proper provision for his younger

son, or whether Gilbert had made away with it after the usual manner of the Heaths, I do not know; but his widow and child betook themselves into Devonshire—selected, perhaps, from its climate approaching nearer than any other part of England to that of her native land—and there lived in a very humble fashion. How Marmaduke ever got into his uncle's hands, I never could clearly understand. His mother had died suddenly, whereupon the family lawyer, Mr. Clint, of Russell Square, who had the entire management of the Heath property, had in the first instance taken possession of the lad; but Sir Massingberd had claimed his right to be the guardian of his nephew, and it could not be disallowed.

Such were mainly the circumstances, I believe. But all sorts of stories were in circulation concerning "Giant Despair," as the savage old baronet was called, and his nephew, the general opinion agreeing only upon one point—that no sane person would change places with Master Marmaduke Heath at Doubting Castle, notwithstanding the greatness of his expectations.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST INTERVIEW.

My own history has little or nothing to do with the present narrative, and therefore I will not allude to it except where it is absolutely necessary. Suffice it to say that my parents were in India, and that for many years Fairburn Rectory was my home. I had no vacations, in the sense that the word is generally understood to mean; I had nowhere else to go to, nor did I wish to go anywhere. No father could have been kinder, or have done his duty better by me, than did Mr. Long. How poor Marmaduke used to envy me my wardship to that good man! I well remember the first day I came to Fairburn. It was early summer; its great woods were in all their glory, and to me, fresh from shipboard and the vast waste of sea, the place seemed a bower of bliss. First, the grey old church tower upon the hill; and then the turrets of the Hall, half hidden in oak; and last, the low-roofed, blossom-entangled cottage where I found so bright a welcome—that was the order in which Fairburn was introduced to visitors in town. The Church, and the Hall, and the Rectory, all lay together; the churchyard, dark with yews, encroached upon the Rectory garden; and that bright spot, so trimly kept that one was moved to pick up a fallen leaf, if such were on its lawn, sloped down into the heart of the

Park. A light iron railing, with wires to prevent the hares and rabbits from entering in and nibbling the flowers, alone divided the great man's land from Mr. Long's trim demesne. The deer came up, and pushed their velvet horns against it. In copse and fern, twinkled the innumerable ear and tail. I had never seen such animals before, and they delighted me hugely. After dinner, on the very day that I arrived, I fed them through the rails, and they ate the bread from my open hand.

"They take you for Marmaduke," said Mr. Long, smiling; "for otherwise they would be shy of a stranger."

"And who is Marmaduke, sir?"

"He is your fellow-pupil, and I make no doubt will be your friend. I wish that he was resident with me, like yourself; but his uncle, who lives at the Hall yonder, will not part with him. He reads with me morning and afternoon, however."

"Does he like reading, sir?" inquired I with hesitation, for I for my part did not. My education, such as it was, had been fitful, incomplete, and in a word, Indian; and I had come back much older than most European boys have to come home, a sad dunce.

"Yes, Marmaduke is very fond of reading," pursued my tutor; "that is, reading of a certain sort. He always does his work well with me, so I must not be hard on him, but he is certainly too fond of novels. And yonder he comes, see, with a book in his hand even as he walks." My tutor pointed to the Park; and there, coming slowly down a long, broad "ride," with his eyes fixed upon a volume he held in his

hand, was a youth of seventeen years old or so, which was about my own age. As he came nearer, I began to see why the deer had mistaken me for him; not indeed, because he was very handsome (which was not at all the case with me), but inasmuch as his complexion was as olive as my own.

"Why, he has been to India too!" whispered I to my tutor, rather disappointed than otherwise, for I had had enough of Indian playmates, and to spare.

"No," returned he in the same low voice; "his mother was an Italian."

Then he introduced us, and I began to hang my head, and play with the buttons of my waistcoat, as is the graceful manner of hobbledehoyes upon such a ceremony; but Marmaduke, completely self-possessed, asked about my journey, and particularly what I had seen at sea. He knew so much about sharks and porpoises that I thought he must have made some long voyage himself, but he told me that such was not the case.

"Though I should like to go to sea of all things," said he; "and I would cruise about that cape—what's its name?—until I met with the 'Flying Dutchman,' that is the vessel which I wish to see."

"I have never heard of her," said I, proud of that nautical use of the feminine. "Is she one of the Company's ships?"

At this my tutor began to rub his hands and chuckle inwardly, as was his wont when vastly amused; but perceiving that the colour came into my cheeks, he laid his hand upon my shoulder kindly, and said that he was glad to find *my* head, at least,

was not stuck full of foolish stories, as some people's heads were; while Marmaduke, without triumphing in the least over my ignorance, explained to me all about that Phantom Ship which glides full sail upon the astonished voyager, and passes through his vessel without shock or noise. He told the tale exactly as if he had heard it straight from the lips of an eyewitness, and believed it himself; he never laughed, and if he smiled he seemed to be sorry that he had done so directly afterwards. Some melancholy thought appeared to occupy his mind at all times; and if a bright fancy crossed it, it was but for an instant, like lightning through the cloud. I am not describing an "interesting" youth, after the manner of romance-writers; no "secret sorrow" obscured the young existence of Marmaduke Heath, but simply, as I subsequently discovered, vulgar, abject terror. His whole being was oppressed by reason of one man. The shadow of Sir Massingberd cast itself over him alike when he went out from his hated presence and when he was about to return to it. He was never free from its nightmare influence—never. His passion for reading was not so much a love of books, as a desire to escape in them from the circumstances of his actual life. If he ever forgot him in earnest talk—and he was the most earnest talker, as a boy, I ever knew—the mention of his uncle's name was a Medusa's Head to turn him into stony silence on the instant. If Marmaduke Heath could only have got away from Fairburn Hall when I first knew him, his mind might have regained its natural vigour and elasticity; but as it was, it grew more sombre and morbid every day. His hungry intellect was nourished

upon what associations happened to be at hand, and they were very unhealthy food. The wickedness of Sir Massingberd was, of course, sufficiently present to him, like some hateful picture hung at a bed's foot, which the eyes of a sleepless man cannot avoid; while every tongue about the Hall was ready to tell him of the evil deeds of his forefathers. At first, I thought my young friend's constant allusion to his family was the result of aristocratic pride, although, indeed, there was nothing to be proud of in what he told me, but very much the reverse; but I soon found that this was not the case. The history of the Heaths was what interested him most of all histories, and he favoured me with extracts from it solely upon that account. As for the fact of their noble blood running in his own veins, he would, I am confident, have far rather been the son of Mrs. Myrtle, the kind old housekeeper at the Rectory.

"We are a doomed race, Peter," he once said to me, not long after we had made friendship with one another. "Generation after generation of us have sinned and sinned. The Corsicans have their family feuds transmitted to them, but they are hostile only to their fellow-men; the Heaths have ever fought against Heaven itself. Each successor to the title seems to have said, like the descendants of Tubal Cain—

'We will not hear, we will not know,
The God that was our father's foe.'

There is the Church," said he, pointing to that glorious pile, which, at Fairburn, was almost a cathedral in magnitude and beauty, "and there is the Hall. They are antagonistic; they are devoted to opposite

purposes. I tell you, yes; our family residence is consecrated to the devil."

I am afraid I could not help laughing at this singular notion.

"Nay," cried he, looking round him furtively, "but you shall see that it is so." We were in the Rectory garden, which communicated with the churchyard by a wicket. He led the way into it; and in a distant corner, upon the north side of the chancel, he showed me a sombre burying place, separated from the rest of the God's acre, and imprisoned in dark purgatorial rails. "Do you know why we are all put there," asked he, "instead of with the other—Christian—folks?"

"You are too proud to lie with the poor, perhaps," returned I, who had still that idea in my mind with regard to Marmaduke himself.

"No," said he; "it is not that, it is because the Heaths will not be buried in consecrated ground."

"But you have a family vault underneath the chancel, have you not?"

"Yes; but it is not 'snug lying.' None of us have been put there since old Sir Hugh, in Queen Anne's time. When they opened the vault for him, they found his father's coffin with its plate to the ground. It had turned over. The witty parson would have it that it was only natural that it should have done so, since its tenant during life had fought alternately for Parliament and King, and was addicted to changing sides. But when Sir Hugh's successor demanded lodging in the place in his turn, they found Sir Hugh's coffin had turned over likewise. The circumstance so terrified the dead man's heir—who had not been on the best terms with him during life, and perhaps

thought he owed him some amends—that he swore his father should not lie in such restless company; and as the late baronet had been at feud with the then rector, he determined to dispense with any assistance from the church at all, and buried him in an adjoining field, which was subsequently made the last resting-place of all our race, as you perceive. The burial service is dispensed with, of course. It would be mere mockery to address such words as Hope and Faith to the corpse of a Heath of Fairburn.”

“My dear Marmaduke,” said I, “you make my very blood run cold. But surely you exaggerate these things. Some of your people have been Catholics, and been buried in their own chapel at the Hall, have they not?”

“Only one of them,” replied the boy with bitterness. “My great-grandfather, Sir Nicholas, abjured his infidelity and became a Papist, in order to secure his bride. He turned the chapel into a banqueting hall, however, and used the sacramental plate in his unholy revels; but after death the priests got hold of him at last, and ‘Nick the Younger,’ as he was called, now lies under the altar which he so often profaned. The beginning of his funeral ceremonies was not conducted so decently as the last rites. He had got outlawed, I believe, or at all events was driven abroad in his latter days, and died there. Nobody at Fairburn had heard of him for many months, when one October night, as Oliver Bradford, who is now the head-keeper, but was then a very young man, was watching in the home-preserves, he heard a terrible noise in the high-road, and making his way out, came upon this spectacle. Two men in black, and upon

black horses, rode by him at full speed, and close behind them came a hearse and four, likewise at the gallop. The plumes upon it waved backwards, he says, like corn, and all the black trappings of the thing fluttered and flapped as it went by. Another man on horseback, singing to himself a drunken song, closed this horrid procession. It moved up towards the village, and Oliver listened to it until the noise seemed to cease about opposite to the Park gates. The solitary witness, frightened enough before, was now doubly terrified; for he made sure that what he had seen was the news of Sir Nicholas's decease, brought over in this ghastly and characteristic fashion. He did not for a single moment imagine that it was a palpable vision, and yet he had seen a veritable funeral pass by. The old baronet had died in France, leaving directions, and the money to carry them out, that his corpse should be taken at night, and at full gallop, through every town that lay between Dover and Fairburn. Alive or dead," added Marmaduke grimly, "the Heaths are a charming family."

"At all events, my dear fellow," said I, laying my hand upon his arm, "you will have nothing to fear from comparison with your forefathers. You may make a good reputation, at a cheap price.¹ A very

¹ I am told by an able friend, who is good enough to revise for me this manuscript, that it is not likely that a mere boy, as I then was, would have made such an observation as the above. I do not doubt that this remark is altogether just; but I am afraid it will apply to so much else in this narrative, that it is scarcely worth while to make an alteration. I am not used to literary composition; I cannot weigh whether this or that is characteristic of a speaker. I am merely a garrulous person, who has, however, such a striking story to tell, that I trust the matter will atone for the manner.

little virtue will go a great way with the next tenant of Fairburn Hall, if half the tales we hear be true."

"And what tales are those?" inquired a deep, low voice at my very elbow.

I believe I jumped a foot or two in the air myself, so great was my alarm. But as for my companion, if those grass-grown tombs which we were contemplating had given up their wicked skeletons before his eyes, he could not have exhibited a greater excess of terror.

Beside me stood a man of Herculean proportions, who, by his dress, might have been taken for an under-gamekeeper, but for a very massive gold chain which hung from the top button-hole of his waistcoat down to its deep-flapped pocket. What is now, I believe, called an "Albert guard," resembles it on a smaller scale; but at the time I speak of such an ornament was altogether unique. His face, too, evidently belonged to one who was used to command. On the forehead was a curious indented curve like the letter U, while his lips curled contemptuously upwards also, in somewhat the same shape. The two together gave him a weird, and, indeed, a demoniacal look, which his white beard, although long and flowing, had not enough of dignity to do away with. I had never heard Sir Massingberd's personal appearance described; but even if I had not had before me his shrinking nephew, I should have recognized at once the features of Giant Despair.

"And what tales are those which are told against the present tenant of Fairburn Hall?" reiterated the baronet, scanning me from head to foot with his cold,

glittering eyes. "And who is this young gentleman who comes to listen to them from the lips of my loving ward?"

"Sir," said I, "your nephew was saying nothing whatever against you, I do assure you. I was merely referring to the gossip of the village, which, indeed, does not make you out to be entirely a saint." I was angry at having been frightened by this man, who, after all, could not hurt *me*. I had been accustomed, too, to Indian life; which, without making one bolder than other people, indisposes one to submit to dictation, which is only the duty of the natives.

Sir Massingberd reached forth one iron finger, and rocked me with it to and fro, though I stood as firm as I could. "Take care, young gentleman, take care," said he; "that spirit of yours will not do down at Fairburn. Mr. Long does not seem to have taught you humility, I think. Marmaduke, go home." He spoke these last words exactly as a man speaks to his dog, who has injudiciously followed him to church on Sunday, in the hope that he was bent on partridge shooting.

The boy instantly obeyed. He shrank away, passing as closely to the churchyard railing as he could, as though he almost feared a blow from his uncle.

"There is humility, there is docility!" sneered the baronet, looking after him. "And if I had *you* up at the Hall, my young bantam, for four and twenty hours or so, I'd make you docile too." He strode away with a laugh like the creaking of an iron hinge, for he saw that I did not dare to answer him. He

strode away over the humble graves, setting his foot deep into their daisied mounds as though in scorn ; and his laugh echoed again and again from the sepulchral walls, for it was joy to Sir Massingberd Heath to know that he was feared.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM BY THE BROOK.

ALTHOUGH my story must needs be sombre wherever it has to do with that person whose name it bears, yet I hope there will be found some sunny spots in it. During the first few months after my arrival at Fairburn, there was nothing to sadden life there that I knew of. I passed my days under green leaves, and not only in a metaphorical sense; for every fine afternoon, immediately after study was over, I betook myself to the Park. The whole place was watched as zealously, even in summer, as the gardens of the Hesperides, but Mr. Long had obtained permission for me to roam at large therein. To me, vexed from childhood by Indian suns, Fairburn Chase—as that part of the demesne most remote from the Hall was called—was far more delightful than it could have been to any mere English boy. Its stately avenues of oaks, tapering into infinite distance, with their checker work of beam and shade, was the realization of my dreams of forest beauty. Nor was its delicious coolness marred by the broad strips of sunlight, at long but equal distances, like the golden stairs of the Angels' Ladder; for those, I knew, marked the interlacing of "the Rides," themselves as fair, and leading, not as the avenue did, to the outer world, but into secret bowers known only to the deer and me.

When Marmaduke was not with me, which often enough happened, poor fellow! and particularly after that unfortunate meeting with his uncle in the churchyard—the whole Chase seemed abandoned to myself. I dare say it was not really so, and that if I had not been a privileged person I should soon have found out my mistake, but for days and days I never saw any human being there. Now and then the figure of a gamekeeper, dwarfed by distance, would make its appearance for a moment, to be lost the next in some leafy glade. But the sense of solitude was thereby rather increased than otherwise, just as the poet tells us in a case where the ear and not the eye was concerned, “the busy woodpecker *made stiller* by his sound the inviolable quietness.” Lying couched in fern, in that lordly pleasure-place, I have myself entertained some poetic thoughts, although they never found expression. Even now, as I shut my eyes, I make an inward picture of some such resting-place; nothing to be seen but the long green feathery stems which the summer air just stirs about my brow, and the broad branches of the oak that stretch themselves motionless between me and the sun; nothing to be heard but the coo of the ring-dove, and the swift stealthy bite of the dappled deer. Nor did Fairburn Chase lack water to complete its beauty. In front of the Hall itself moved a broad slow stream, which presently slid rather than fell down ledges of mossy stone into a wilderness of trees and shrubs, through which it wandered on like one who has lost his way, but singing blithely nevertheless. Another stream, which was my favourite, burst spring-like from the very heart of the Chase, having been arti-

ficially conveyed beneath the avenue, and ran quite a little river, and at a great rate, to form the island where the herons lived ; after which, as though it had done its work, it went its way tranquilly enough. If it had nothing to boast of but the heronry it might have been a proud little brook, for never did colony of those solemn birds take their sad pleasure in a more lovely spot ; but besides it had a certain bend in it—essential to the beauty of a brook as straightness is to that of a tree—which I have never seen rivalled elsewhere. Its right bank rose there, though not abruptly, and left half its bed of brown sand and loose tinkling shingle bare to the sunlight, save so much of it as the shade of a cluster of lime-trees could cover. Here the bee and the bird brought their songs, and the dragon-flies the glory of their turquoise armour and glittering wings throughout the summer noons. The cool fragrant smell of the limes, and the drowsy music of the insects that haunted them, were inexpressibly pleasant to me, who, I am afraid, had not a little of the Asiatic indolence in my nature. Sometimes a group of swans sailed by on the unruffled stream, themselves a slumbrous pageant fit enough to herald sleep ; but at all events, swans or no swans, I often did sleep there. One July afternoon, in particular, when the heat was almost as intense as at Calcutta, and no punkahs to cool one, I went to this place with malice prepense to lie there and do nothing, which, from my youth up, has always been synonymous with a *siesta*. I cannot do absolutely nothing, and yet keep awake. I very much admire the people whom I often meet in railway carriages, who endure, without books or newspapers, hundreds of miles

of weary travel, and who do it with their eyes open. I wonder they do not break out into a melody, or at least a whistle. They cannot possibly be thinking all that time, and indeed they have no appearance of employing themselves in that way, but "stare right on with calm eternal eyes," with no more speculation in them than those of the Sphinx herself. I envy, but I cannot imitate those happy persons. There is no such state of coma with me; I either wake or sleep.

I lay, then, beneath the limes by the brook in Fairburn Chase, half-buried in the soft brown sand; and even while I looked upon the glancing stream, with the grand old willow opposite, that bent its hoary honours half-way o'er, the scene dissolved and changed; the brook became a river, and the willow a palm-tree, and the Chase a sandy tract, and the fir-clump on the distant hill the snow-capped Himalaya. I saw, too—and alas! I was never more to see them, except, as then, in dreams—my father and my mother: but they passed by me with pitiful, loving looks, and went their way. Then the ayah, the black nurse who was watching over me—for I was once more a child—stole down to the river-brink, and drew a fluted dagger from her bosom, and dipped it in the sacred flood, and I felt that I was to die. I knew her well; we two had loved one another as nurse and child do love, where the nurse perforce takes half the mother's part; as the child grows up, his affection, at the best, congeals to gratitude; but not so with the breast that suckled him—God forgive us men; and the pain of my dream was sharpest because it was my own dear ayah who was about to slay me. I had offended Vishnu, or else she would.

not have done it; her gods demanded my life of her; but she was sorry; I felt her cold lips upon my brow, and then a large round tear fell upon my cheek like icy hail, and I awoke. There was a tumult of sounds in the air; the birds, and the bees, and the bubbling wave, silent while I had slept, seemed to have burst out together in chorus at my waking. I was bewildered, and knew not where I was. My dream was more distinct at first than the realities about me. If I had but closed my eyes again, I knew that it would be continued at the spot where it had left off, that the fluted dagger would have drunk my life-blood; and therefore I made an effort to rouse myself. Wondrous are dreams, and wondrous the border-land 'twixt life and sleep! If my existence had depended upon it, I could not, for some seconds, have told for certain whether I was in England or in India. Then reason began to re-assume her sway, and the vague mysterious powers, of whom we shall one day perhaps have a more certain knowledge, withdrew reluctant from their usurped dominion over me. I remembered, however, most distinctly, every incident that they had brought about, and I placed my hand mechanically upon my left cheek—I had been lying upon my right—upon which the tear had seemed to fall. Great Heaven, *it was still wet!* I was really startled. The cloudless sky forbade the idea of a drop of rain having fallen; I had shed no tear myself while dreaming, for my eyes were dry, and even if I had, it could scarcely have dropped as it did, making a cool round spot in the centre of the cheek—it would have slid down and left a little frigid line: there were no stones for the stream to splash against and thus besprinkle me.

It was very odd. Still, I did not imagine for a moment that my poor black nurse had really come across the seas to drop the tributary tear upon her sleeping boy; moreover, she could scarcely have got away so suddenly without leaving some trace of her departure, some——. My heart all of a sudden ceased to beat; a shiver ran through me, as runs from stem to stern through a doomed ship that comes end on at speed upon a sunken rock; my eyes had fallen—while I thus reasoned with myself—upon a sight to terrify an older man than I, after such a dream; *the print of a woman's bare feet in the sand*. Had there been any footprints—those of a keeper or watcher, for instance—I should have been startled to know that some one had passed by while I slumbered, for most certainly the sand had been untrodden up to the moment I had lost consciousness; but that a woman with naked feet had been really present while I dreamed that horrible dream, was something more than startling. In Scotland such a circumstance would have been less remarkable, but in Fairburn I had not yet seen any person without shoes. There were a considerable number of footprints, but only of one individual: she had stood beside me for some time, for they were deeper close to the place where I had lain, and there was also one impression there which looked as though the mysterious visitor had knelt. They had come and returned the same way, which was not the one that I had come myself, and they began and ended at the streamside a few yards beyond, and out of sight of the bend which was my favourite haunt. The woman had doubtless crossed and recrossed by means of some natural stepping-stones that showed their heads above water; there

was no path on the other side, but only a tangled thicket, through which it would have been impossible to track her, even had I been so disposed, which I was not. To say truth, I was terribly discomposed. For a minute or two I clung to the notion that the footprints were my own, made, perhaps, under the influence of somnambulism. I took off my shoes, and measured the tracks with my own feet, but I found, boy as I was, that mine effaced them. They were certainly the marks of a woman; smaller than those of a grown male, yet firmer set than those of a child. Never since the days of Robinson Crusoe was ever man so panic-struck by footprints in the sand as I. Although it was broad daylight, and the air was alive with sounds, I fairly trembled. The many evil stories which, during my short stay at Fairburn, I had already heard of the old Hall, a corner of which I could discern from where I stood, crowded in upon my brain! the whole demesne seemed under a malign influence—enchanted ground. I turned from the spot, whose lonely beauty had once so won my soul, with fear and loathing; and as I turned, there rang out—it may have been from the thicket across the stream, but the echoes took it up so suddenly, that it seemed to ring all around me—a laugh so terrible, so demoniacally mocking, that I could scarcely believe it came from mortal throat. Again and again it rose, and circled about, as though it would have headed my fleeing steps, and driven me back upon some dreadful Thing, while I fled through the fern towards home at my topmost speed, and the white-tailed rabbits scampered to left and right, less frightened than I.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUMB WITNESS.

A SENTIMENT of shame prevented my mentioning the affair of the footprints to my tutor; and as for Marmaduke, although we were by this time very intimate, I would not have furnished him with a new occasion for detesting Fairburn Chase upon any account. Not only, however, was my favourite haunt by the brook become an object of aversion to me, but I confess I took much less delight in any part of the Heath demesne. I kept my eyes about me, even in the great avenue, and upon the whole preferred the rector's little garden, if at any time I had a mind for sleeping out of doors.

"Meredith," observed Mr. Long to me one morning—he called me "Peter" generally, but when he had anything serious to say it was "Meredith"—"it appears to me that you don't take nearly so much exercise as you used to do. Your appetite is failing. I am really concerned about you."

"Thank you, sir, I am pretty well."

"Nonsense, Peter, no boy should be 'pretty well;' he should be in the rudest, vulgarest health, or else he is in a bad way. Your good father advised me that if you seemed the least to need it, I should get you a nag. It is Crittenden Fair next week. What say you to my buying you a horse?"

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"Thank you, sir, that is just what I should like," cried I. "I am certainly getting tired of walking about alone." And then I began to blush a little, for of late rather than go into the Chase I had been accompanying my tutor in his favourite diversion of fishing, which I cared nothing about, or else in his parochial expeditions.

"Don't be afraid to speak out, my boy," said Mr. Long, with a kind smile, "you will not hurt my feelings. You and I are very good friends, but you want somebody of your own age to be your companion. Isn't that it? And very natural too. No young gentleman, except in story-books, enjoys the society of his tutors. Even Sandford and Merton got a little tired of good Mr. Barlow, I fancy, he was so desperately full of information. You want a fellow who can shy stones and climb trees."

"No, sir, indeed I don't," said I, a little indignantly; for I was getting too old, I flattered myself, for any boyish escapades of that sort. "But I do wish that Marmaduke was allowed to come out with me a little more. Would not Sir Massingberd let him have a horse also?"

Mr. Long shook his head, and was silent for a little; then, as if in continuation of his thought, he added, "And yet, I don't know, we'll go over to the Hall and see about it this very morning."

"I, sir?" inquired I, in astonishment; for I had never set foot in Doubting Castle, or seen it from any nearer spot than the Heronry.

"Did I say 'we?'" said Mr. Long, reflectively. "I didn't mean to do so, but I really see no reason why you shouldn't come. You would wait a con-

siderable time if you waited for an invitation from Sir Massingberd, but—— 'Tush, if poor Marmaduke lives there, and yet remains a good boy, half an hour's visit will not be the ruin of the lad." The latter part of this remark was uttered aloud, although intended to be strictly private, which was not an uncommon occurrence with my worthy tutor, and I have noticed the same peculiarity in other persons of studious habits. He led the way into the road at once, pursuing which, under the park wall, we presently came upon a little door, which my tutor opened with a private key. This admitted us into the wall-garden, or, as it was sometimes called, from the quantities of that fruit which it contained, the peach-garden. An enormous area was here entirely given up to the cultivation of fruits; in the centre were strawberry-beds, gooseberries, melon-beds, the glasses of which dazzled you to behold; and raspberries upon trellis-work, on so extensive a scale that it looked like a maze. The northern end was occupied by an enormous green-house, which in those days was rather a rare adjunct, even to a rich man's garden. But the most surprising sight was that of the walls covered with spread-eagled fruit-trees, or, as school-boys then called them, "Lawk-a-daisies," laden with the most exquisite dainties—peaches, nectarines, apricots, and bloomy plums. A number of men were busily employed about this teeming scene.

"Why do they say Sir Massingberd is poor?" inquired I. "Is not all this his?"

"Yes; it is all his."

"Well, but what valuable fruit, and what enor-

mous quantities of it ! Why, he would make a large income, even if he was to sell it."

"He does sell it," replied my tutor, smiling. "Nineteen out of twenty of all these peaches will find their way to Covent Garden. Why, how could he eat them, you foolish boy? Even if he gave them away to all Fairburn, he would introduce the cholera."

"A baronet and a market-gardener!" exclaimed I. "Well, that seems very odd."

Mr. Long did not choose to inform me at that time that almost all the income Sir Massingberd had was drawn from this source, and from the selling of game, with which his great preserves were overflowing. The staff of gardeners and of keepers was retained mainly upon this account. In the interest of Marma-duke, Mr. Clint, the family lawyer, did, I believe, contribute a certain annual sum for keeping up the gardens and the Chase; but this was by private arrangement, and at his own risk and responsibility. Thus it was that while some parts of the Fairburn demesne were as admirably maintained as possible, others were suffered to fall into decay. Just as we emerged from the wall-garden, for instance, there was a small artificial hollow planted with trees, and within it, peering above ground, a thatched roof covered with moss and mildew, and with great gaps and holes in it. This was the ice-house—in these Wenham Lake and Refrigerator days an almost obsolete building, but in the time I write of considered a necessary appendage to every country seat. Next we entered an arcade of immense length, which the noonday rays would have striven in vain to penetrate, but for the spaces where the trellis-work had given way through age and

neglect, and the ivy trailed down from rusted nails and obstructed the way. Seats were placed in niches at unequal intervals upon one side of this arcade; but they looked very unattractive, damp, worm-eaten, cracked, and here and there with a slug upon them, making slimy paths. Yet from one of these alcoves there started up, while we were still a long way off, a female figure, and stood for a moment looking at us in great surprise. Above her happened to be one of those broken portions of the leafy roof, and through it the sunlight poured right down in a golden flood, as a glory sometimes does in ancient pictures. A tall, dark woman, who must have been exquisitely beautiful in her youth, and even now retained considerable attractions; her eyes were large and lustrous, and her hair—never even in India had I seen hair more dark, or so luxuriant. It was not rolled tight at the back in a great pillow, as was then the fashion, or, indeed, confined in any way, but streamed down over her shoulders, and far below that place where it was the pleasure of our ancestresses to consider that their waists occurred. She cast upon us at first a glance haughty and almost defiant, but upon recognizing my companion, quenched her fiery looks.

“Stop here, my lad,” whispered Mr. Long, laying his hand firmly upon my shoulder; “wait till she has gone away.”

The woman saw the gesture, although she could not have heard the words. “I shall not bite the boy, Mr. Long,” cried she, with a shrill laugh; “however, I will make myself scarce.” She took a few rapid steps to an opening on the right of the arcade, which led to the lawn and flower-garden, and was lost to us in a moment.

"I did not know there were any ladies at the Hall," said I.

My tutor did not answer, but walked on muttering to himself as if annoyed. I did not repeat the remark, for I was wondering within myself whether it could be this woman who had watched my sleep and knelt by me, dagger in hand, according to my dream. She looked just the sort of female to drive such an instrument home, if she entertained that fancy—a Judith, equal to the slaying of any Holofernes, and far more of a slight-built, overgrown Indian lad like me. There was certainly something uncanny about her, and I thought it very strange that Marmaduke had never spoken to me of her existence.

The arcade brought us out into a sunk garden, which was a rosary, on to which opened the tall windows of a noble-looking room. The walls, I could see, were lined with books, and on the numerous tables lay portfolios and volumes that gave promise of great store of plates. This was the library where Marmaduke had told me he passed his only happy hours at Fairburn. His uncle rarely so much as entered it, although he was not without some reputation for learning. In particular, it was said that he was well acquainted with divinity, and could quote chapter and verse of the Bible against the parson. I have since had reason to believe, that his talents in this way were greatly exaggerated. What he had ever read he doubtless recollected, if his memory served him as well in literary matters as when he had a grudge to pay; but I cannot think that he ever studied divinity. If he had any knowledge of

the Bible at all, it doubtless astonished all who knew him, and they made the most of it.

A few steps farther brought us to the north face of the mansion, in which was the principal entrance. Notwithstanding the broad sweep in front of the steps, and the avenue branching right and left, there did not seem space enough as contrasted with the vast mass of trees. The scene was like a clearing in a forest, where the openings are artificial, and the wood comes by nature rather than the converse, and even in that September day the air struck chill. The griffins that guarded the great stone steps had lost, the one an ear, and the other a wing, and the steps themselves were chipped and cracked. The grass which grew there unchecked at other seasons had, however, been scraped out, because Sir Massingberd's guests were expected immediately for the shooting. None of them, however, had as yet arrived. The great bell which answered our summons clanged through the place as though there had been neither furniture nor people within it. The vast door was opened long before its echoes ceased, and, indeed, with marvellous quickness. When the man saw who we were, he looked vexed at having put himself in a flurry without necessity. He thought, doubtless, it was his master who demanded admittance, and had come post haste from the pantry, it being very dangerous to keep the baronet waiting. We were ushered into the great hall, and left there while the man went to seek Sir Massingberd. This huge apartment was evidently used as a sitting-room. There were couches and comfortable chairs in profusion, and a fine aroma of tobacco pervaded everything. The walls were

ornamented with antlers and the heads of foxes ; a number of fishing-rods stood in one corner ; in another lay some of those clubs that are used for exercising the muscles. On the table was an open pocket-book, stuck full of gorgeous artificial flies. Presently the man reappeared. Sir Massingberd would see us in his private sitting-room. We walked over polished oak, on which I could with difficulty keep my footing, down a long passage hung with grim portraits of the Heath family, "all dead and judged," as Marmaduke subsequently informed me, until we came to a short flight of steps on the left hand. These we descended, and following the footsteps of our conductor in almost perfect darkness, came upon double doors, the inner of which, a baize one, admitted us into the presence of the proprietor. The baronet was in his shirt-sleeves, cleaning a double-barrelled gun.

"This is my pupil, Peter Meredith," said Mr. Long.

"*I* know the young gentleman," replied Sir Massingberd, curtly, and the horse-shoe upon his brow contracted as he spoke. "What makes you bring him here?"

"Well, Sir Massingberd," observed my tutor, forcing a laugh, "that is scarcely a hospitable observation. I bring this friend of your nephew's because what I have to propose concerns them both. It is good for these boys to be together, not to live solitary lives ; and to keep them mewed up at home, as they are now, is a positive cruelty. Marmaduke is getting thinner and paler every day ; and Meredith——"

"Do *you really* think so, parson?" asked the

baronet eagerly, omitting for a moment to use the dirty-looking piece of oiled flannel which had previously monopolized his attention.

"I do, indeed, Sir Massingberd. I believe that if a doctor was to give his opinion about that boy——"

"The Heaths never send for doctors or for clergymen," interrupted the baronet with a sneer.

"And yet they have often needed advice, both spiritual and temporal," quoth my tutor, stoutly. "I say you should get a horse for your nephew's riding; it need be no trouble to you whatever. I am going over to Crittenden Fair next week myself to purchase one for my pupil; now, let me get one for your nephew also."

At first Sir Massingberd's countenance expressed nothing but angry impatience, but presently he began to rub the gun-barrel less and less violently. "And who is to find the money?" inquired he.

"I think that can be managed, Sir Massingberd. Mr. Clint will doubtless listen to such an application on behalf of Marmaduke; he will risk advancing a few pounds——"

"For thirty-five guineas one can get a very good pony," observed the baronet, reflectively.

"Or even for less," returned Mr. Long, drily; and then, to my excessive terror, he added in quite a loud a key, "He wants to keep the difference; that's his plan."

"And he means to do it, too," observed Sir Massingberd, grimly. "No, you needn't apologize, parson, for your thinking aloud; you don't suppose I am going to do anything without being paid for it, do

you? Then there's the keep of the animal. Now, what will Mr. Clint allow me for that, do you suppose? Oats and beans are very expensive, and you wouldn't have me feed my dear nephew's pony upon hay!"

Sir Massingberd was a formidable object at all times, but I really think he inspired more fear when he was pleased—when some wicked notion tickled him—than even when he was in wrath.

"I think, Sir Massingberd, the question of expense can be managed to your satisfaction," said my tutor, not a little overwhelmed by having thus involuntarily expressed his suspicion of the baronet; "and, as I have said, I will save you all trouble by selecting the horse myself."

"Certainly not, sir," exclaimed Sir Massingberd, savagely; "I suffer no man to choose my horses for me."

"Very good," replied Mr. Long, biting his lip. "I have only to stipulate, then, that if your nephew gets the horse, he is to ride it. I shall have to make myself answerable for that much to Mr. Clint."

"Oh, he shall ride it," quoth the baronet, with a horrid imprecation; "you may take your oath of that. And, by-the-bye, since you are here, parson, I want to have some talk with you about that same fellow Clint, who has been behaving devilish ill to me, I think. You may go away, young gentleman, *you* may. You'll find your future riding companion—he has about as much notion of riding as old Grimjaw yonder—sulking in his own room, I daresay. Grimjaw, show the young gentleman up to Marmaduke's room."

At these words a dog of horrible aspect came out from under the very sofa on which I sat, and trotted

off towards the door. He was the oldest and ugliest dog I ever beheld. He had only one eye, which was green; he had no teeth, and was therefore not to be feared as a combatant; but his aspect was loathsome and repulsive to the last degree. The people of Fairburn imagined this animal to be Sir Massingberd's familiar demon, and, until of late years, when the creature had become incapacitated by age from accompanying him much, the two were scarcely ever seen apart. Old as he was, however, the hideous Grimjaw had some instinct left, which, after the word "Marmaduke" had been once more shrieked at him, caused him painfully to precede me up the oak staircase, and along another gallery to a chamber door, at which he sat and whined. This was immediately opened by his young master, who, with a "Come in, Grim," was only giving sufficient space for the entrance of the dog, when I cried out, laughing: "What, have you no welcome for your friend? Like uncle, like nephew! What a pair of curmudgeons inhabit Fairburn Hall!"

The astonishment of Marmaduke at hearing my voice was excessive. Notwithstanding his pleasure, his first thought, as usual, was: "Did Sir Massingberd know?"

"Yes," said I, coolly; "of course he knows. He received me down-stairs with his usual politeness. Mr. Long and he are conversing upon some private matters, so I came up here to see you. It is arranged that each of us is to have a horse, and that we are to go out riding together."

"A horse! Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Marmaduke, clapping his hands. "How did the good par-

son ever persuade my uncle? What *did* he give him?"

I could not help laughing at this naïve inquiry, which my friend had made in perfect seriousness. I told him all that had occurred, including our tutor's *virtu-voce* soliloquy, at which Marmaduke cried "Heavens!" in terror.

"It is marvellous, notwithstanding, that my uncle should have consented," observed my companion, musing. "He told me, indeed, that I should be a great nuisance in the house this month, while his friends were down here shooting; but that he should have entered into an arrangement which gives me pleasure as well as gets rid of me, that seems so very strange."

"He has doubtless some base motive," returned I, smiling; "let us console ourselves with that reflection. But what have we here? Water-colour paintings! Why have you never told me you were an artist?"

"I merely amuse myself with the paint-brush. I have had no lessons, of course, so that my perspective is quite Chinese."

"Nay, but I recognize almost all these scenes!"

"Well, you know, I have been nowhere else but at Fairburn, so that it is from thence I must take my subjects. The one you have there is taken from the bend in the stream beyond the Heronry."

"It is admirable," said I; and indeed it was so like the scene of my dream, that it gave me a shudder.

"Would you like to have it?" replied Marmaduke, carelessly. "You may take any that the portfolio

contains. I only wish they were more worth your acceptance."

"Thank you," said I nervously, "I will certainly take this one, then;" and I rolled the sketch tightly up, and placed it in my pocket. "But here is a pretty face! Why, Master Marmaduke, you have your secrets, I see; you have never mentioned to me this young lady. What beautiful hair! The eyes, too, how glorious, and yet how tender! It is surely not the lady whom we just met in the ar——"

"Silence, sir!" cried Marmaduke, in a voice of thunder. His face was lurid with rage, and for the first time I remarked upon his forehead a faint reflection of the horse-shoe that made so terrible the brow of his uncle. "Do not speak of that wretched woman in the same breath with, with——" He did not complete the sentence, but added in his usual soft musical tones: "Pardon me, my friend; I am sorry to have been so hasty; but that picture is the portrait of my mother."

"It was stupid in me not to have known that at once," said I. "The likeness is most remarkable."

"But not the expression," returned he, sadly. "I know that just now I looked like one of my own race. She was always an angel, even when she was upon earth." And the boy looked up with his hands clasped, as though he beheld her, through his tears, in heaven.

"Did you paint that from a picture, Marmaduke?"

"No, from memory. Sleeping or waking, I often see her sweet face."

I had evidently raised by my thoughtlessness a

long train of melancholy thoughts in my companion. The situation was embarrassing, and I did not know how to escape from it. As often happens with well-intentioned but blundering persons, I made the most inopportune remark that could be framed. Forgetting what I had heard of the infamous treatment which Mrs. Heath had received while under her brother-in-law's roof, I observed: "Your mother was once at Fairburn, was she not? That should at least make the Hall more endurable to you."

Again Marmaduke's handsome face was disfigured with concentrated passion. "Yes, she was here," returned he, speaking through his teeth. "For what she suffered alone, the place would be cursed. Coward, scoundrel! Why does God suffer such men to live?" It was terrible to see how like this young lad grew to the man he was execrating. He went on using such language as I could not have conceived him capable of employing.

"Marmaduke," said I, soothingly, "for Heaven's sake, be calm. Providence will one day reward this man; it is not for you to curse him. Come, now that I pay you a visit for the first time, you should play the host, and show me over the mansion. Why, that queer old dog seems to understand what one says; he rises as though he were the châtelain, and kept the keys of Doubting Castle. He brought me here as true as a blind man's cur. I cannot say, however, that he is beautiful; he is hideous, weird."

"It would be strange, indeed, if he were like other dogs," returned Marmaduke, gravely. "He is the sole living repository of a most frightful secret.

If he could but speak, he could perhaps send a man to the gallows."

"What man?" exclaimed I. "Pray explain to me this mystery."

"I do not know what man," returned my companion, solemnly; "I only conjecture. I will relate to you what is known of the matter, and you shall judge for yourself."

Marmaduke opened the door to see that no one was in the passage without, and then seating himself close beside me, commenced as follows:—"My grandfather and the present baronet, lived on bad terms with one another. For the last ten years of his life Sir Wentworth and his eldest son never met but once, if they met at all. He had been very profligate and extravagant in his young days, but in his old age he grew miserly. When my father saw him last it was in a small house in Bedford Place, in London, where he lived in a couple of ill-furnished rooms, and without a servant. Grimjaw and he slept there alone, but a charwoman came in every morning for a few hours. Sir Wentworth then gave it as his reason for this kind of life that he was retrenching, in order to leave some suitable provision for his second son. 'Look here, Gilbert,' said he upon one occasion to my father, 'I have begun to lay by for you already;' and he showed him a quantity of bank-notes, amounting to several thousand pounds. He had never been an affectionate parent, or exhibited any self-denial for the benefit of his sons, and my father did not believe him. He thanked him, of course; but he came away without any idea that he would be really better off at Sir Wentworth's death. This was fortunate for him,

for he never received a farthing; but I am not so certain, as he was, that the baronet did not intend to do what he promised. While the old man was living in this sordid fashion, his son Massingberd was passing his time very gaily at court. He played high, and there were few who could beat him with the cards, but there were some. It is no use being a good player, you see, unless you are the best; you only win from those whom you can beat, to lose it in your turn to the man who can beat you. Thus it was with my uncle, who played, as I say, high with everybody; but highest, as is often the case, with his superiors in skill. However, he paid his debts of honour with money raised at an enormous sacrifice. He lived well, but it was upon his future prospects. At last, being harder pressed than usual, he wrote to his father—the first letter he had penned to him for years—and demanded pecuniary help.

“Sir Wentworth wrote back a cynical, harsh reply, a copy of which I have seen—for all these details came out in the course of the inquest. He bade his son come to call upon him, and judge from his style of living whether he was in a condition to comply with his request. He appointed a day and an hour—about five o’clock. It was in December, and quite dark, of course, by that time. At six o’clock on the appointed day Sir Massingberd—for he had got his title by that time, whether he knew it or not—called at the police station near Bedford Place, and gave information that the house which his father occupied was shut up, and that he could not obtain admittance, although he had arrived there by appointment. The house was always shut up, they

told him, although not untenanted. They could not explain why his summons had not been answered. A couple of policemen accompanied him to break open the door. While they were thus engaged, a dog howled at them from inside. My uncle had made no mention of having heard this before. There was only one lock to force, the door being neither bolted nor chained, and they soon got in. The only two furnished rooms in the house opened upon the hall. In the sleeping-room they found my grandfather dressed, but lying on the bed quite dead—suffocated, as the surgeons subsequently averred. In the sitting-room, with which it communicated, they found this dog here, crouching on the top of the mantel-piece, which was very lofty. How he got there, nobody could tell; if he leaped thither, even from a chair, it must have been in an agony of terror. He was whining pitifully when they entered; but upon seeing my uncle he ceased to whimper, and absolutely seemed to shrink into himself with fear. Poor Grimjaw could give no witness at the inquest, however, so the jury returned an open verdict. It was probable that Sir Wentworth had had a fit of apoplexy, which carried him off.”

“Well,” said I, “and is not that probable enough?”

“Yes; but it could not have carried off the bank-notes—which were all gone—likewise. Could it, Grimjaw?”

Thus appealed to, the ancient dog set up a quavering howl, which might easily have been mistaken for the cry of an accusing spirit.

“Good Heavens! this is too horrible,” cried I.

"Be careful, Marmaduke, that you do not mention this to others. It is a frightful slander."

"Slander!" returned my companion, calmly. "It is you who slander, if you suspect anybody. I have only told you what everybody knew at the time the mur——well, then, when Sir Wentworth had his fit. The thing strikes you as it does me, that is all."

"But is it not inconceivable," urged I, "if the crime was committed by the person we are thinking of, that he should retain this dumb witness of his atrocity, that he should let it live, far less should keep it in his private sitting-room——"

"No!" interrupted Marmaduke, firmly. "On the contrary, it strengthens my suspicions. You do not know the man as I do. It gives him gratification to subdue even a dog. This creature has no love for my uncle; but its excessive terror of him, which endured for months, nay, years, has gradually worn off. He obeys him now; whereas, as I have been told, it was long before it could do anything but shiver at the sound of his voice. After dinner, when I have been sitting with Sir Massingberd alone, he will sometimes give the dog a biscuit, saying with an awful smile: "Here, Grimjaw; you and I know something that nobody else knows; don't we?"

"Great Heavens!" cried I, in horror; "and what does he do that for?"

"Because," replied Marmaduke, bitterly, "he loves to see me tremble."

CHAPTER V

THE STATE BEDROOM.

MARMADUKE had scarcely concluded his narration, when steps were heard in the passage. I daresay I turned pale at the thought of seeing the man of whom I had just heard such frightful things, for my companion observed, as if to reassure me, "It is only Mr. Long."

"Are you quite sure?" said I.

Marmaduke smiled sadly.

"Do you think that I do not know my uncle's step? I should recognize it amongst a score of others. If he overtook me in a crowded street, I should feel that he was coming, and shudder as he passed beside me—— Pray, come in, sir."

"Well," cried my tutor, entering, radiant with his good news, "no more moping at home, my lads; you are to be henceforth cavaliers—you are to scour the country. Boot and saddle! boot and saddle! Your uncle will not trust me to get you a steed, Marmaduke; there are none good enough for you, it seems, at Crittenden; he is going to send to London for an animal worthy of you. But never mind, Peter; you shall have the best mount that can be got in Midshire, and we will pit the country nag against the town."

My tutor's voice revived me like a cordial: after

the morbid horrors I had been listening to, his cheery talk was inexpressibly grateful, as the dawn and ordinary sounds of waking life are welcome to one who has suffered from a nightmare.

"I was just about to show Meredith the Hall," said Marmaduke.

"Well, it is time that we should be at our work, like good boys," observed Mr. Long, consulting his watch; "but still, for one morning, it does not matter, if you would like to stay, Peter."

"I would rather go home, sir," cried I, with involuntary eagerness. I was sorry the next moment, even before I saw the pained expression of my young companion.

"He has had enough of Fairburn Hall already," said he, bitterly. Then his face softened sadly, as though he would have said: "Am I not, therefore, to be pitied, who pass every day and night under this accursed roof?"

"Come," exclaimed Mr. Long, gaily, "I do not believe, Master Meredith, in this new-born devotion to your books. Let us go over the house first. I will accompany you as cicerone, for I once knew every hole and corner of it—a great deal better, I will venture to affirm, than the heir himself here." With these words he led the way into the passage.

"Every chamber on this floor is the fac-simile of its neighbour," said Marmaduke: "since you have seen mine, you have seen all—an immense bed, a piece of carpet islanded amid a black sea of oak, a cupboard or two large enough to live in, and shepherdesses, with swains in ruffles, occupying the walls."

There was, indeed, no appreciable difference in any of the rooms, except with regard to their aspect.

"When I first came to Fairburn, I slept here," continued Marmaduke, as we entered an apartment looking to the north, "and had that long illness, which you doubtless remember, sir. Heavens, what dreams I have had in this room! I have seen people standing by my bedside at night as clearly as I see you now. They called me delirious, but I believe I was stark mad."

"I remember it well," said Mr. Long, "although I did not recollect that you occupied this room. How was it that you came to change your quarters?"

"Oh, the doctor recommended the removal very strongly. Sir Massingberd said it was all nonsense about the look-out from my window, and that the east was as bad as the north for a boy in a fever; but he was obliged to give way. And I certainly benefited by the change. The park is a much more cheerful sight than that forest of firs, and one is glad to see the sun, even when one cannot get out of doors. At all events, I had no such evil dreams."

"Yet this is what always used to be held the state-chamber," replied my tutor. "Charles I. occupied that bed while he was yet king; and before your ancestor, Sir Hugh, turned Puritan—a part he was very unfitted to play—it is said he used to swear through his nose. Peter the Great, too, is said to have passed a night here. Your dreams, therefore, should have been historical and noteworthy. I forget which of these smiling Phyllises is so complaisant as to make way when you would leave the room without using the door."

Two full-length female portraits were painted in panel, one on either side of the huge chimney-piece; a circlet of roses carved in oak surrounded each by way of frame. Mr. Long advanced towards the one on the right, and touched the bottom rose; it did not move. He went to the other, and did likewise; the rose revolved in his fingers, and presently, with a creak and a groan, the whole picture slid sideways over the wall, disclosing a narrow flight of wooden stairs.

"That is charming," cried I. "That is the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' realized. Where does it lead to, Marmaduke?" There was no answer. Mr. Long and I looked round simultaneously. The lad was ghastly pale. He stared into the dusty, gaping aperture, as though it had been a grave's mouth.

"I do not know," he gasped, with difficulty.

"Not know?" cried my tutor. "Do you mean to say that you have never been told of Jacob's Ladder? The foot of it is in the third bookcase on the left of the library door; the spring is somewhere in the index to 'Josephus.' It is evident you never attempted to take down that interesting work, which in this case is solid wood. The idea of your not knowing that! And yet Sir Massingberd is so reticent that, with the exception of Gilmore, the butler, I dare say nobody *does* know it now. It is twenty years ago since I made Phyllis move aside, to the astonishment of Mr. Clint, who came down here on business with poor Sir Wentworth. I dare say nobody has moved her since."

"Yes, yes," cried Marmaduke, passionately; "my uncle has moved her. Those visions were not dreams.

I see it all now. He wanted to frighten me to death, or to make me mad. When I knew the door was fast locked, he would come and stand by my bedside, and stare at me. Cruel, cruel coward!"

"Hush, hush, Marmaduke; this is monstrous—this is impossible!" cried Mr. Long, endeavouring to pacify the boy, who was rocking himself to and fro in an agony of distress and rage. "See how you terrify Peter! Be calm, for Heaven's sake! Your uncle will hear you presently, and you know how he hates to be disturbed."

At the mention of his uncle, Marmaduke subdued his cries by a great effort, but he still sobbed and panted, as if for breath.

"Oh," moaned he, "consider how I came hither from my dead mother's arms to this man's house—my only living relative, my father's brother—and was taken ill here, a mere child; then this wretch, this demon, my host, my ——. Oh, Mr. Long, could you conceive it even of a Heath? He came up to my lonely room by that secret way, and stood without speaking by my pillow, while I lay speechless, powerless, imagining myself to be out of my mind."

"I do remember now," said my tutor, gravely, "how you harped upon that theme of your evil dreams, and how the doctor thought you were in reality losing your reason. Let us be thankful, however, that you were preserved from so sad a fate; you are no longer a child now; Sir Massingberd can frighten you no more, even if he had the wish. It was a wicked, hateful act, whatever was the motive. But let us forget it. In a few years you will be of age; then you will leave the Hall; and in the mean-

time your uncle will annoy you no more. It will be his interest to make a friend of you. Even now, you see, he provides you with the means of enjoyment. You will ride out with your friend whenever you please; and I will take measures so that you shall be more with us at the Rectory, and less at this melancholy place, which is totally unfit for you. Mr. Clint shall be spoken with, if necessary. Yes, yes," added Mr. Long, reversing the rose, and thereby replacing the shepherdess, but quite unaware that he was still speaking aloud, "there must be a limit to the power of such a guardian; the Chancellor shall interfere, and Sir Massingberd be taught——."

"Nay, sir," cried Marmaduke in turn; "for Heaven's sake, let no complaint be made against my uncle upon my account; perhaps, as you say, I may now meet with better treatment. I will be patient. Say nothing of this, I pray you, Meredith. Mr. Long, you know——."

"Yes, I know all," interrupted my tutor, with excitement. "You have a friend in me, Marmaduke, remember, who will stick by you. I have shut my eyes and my ears long enough, and perhaps too long. If things get worse with you, my lad, do not forget that you have a home at the Rectory. Once there, you will not return to this house again. I will give evidence myself; I will——."

"Thank you, thank you," replied Marmaduke, hurriedly. "All will now be well, doubtless; but my uncle will wonder at your long delay—he will suspect something. I think it will be better if you left."

He led the way down the great staircase, throwing an involuntary glance over his shoulder, as we crossed

the mouth of the dark passage leading to the baronet's room. "This is a wretched welcome, Meredith; some day, perhaps, I may take your hand at this Hall door under different circumstances. Good-bye, good-bye."

And so we parted, between the two grim griffins.

"Peter," said my tutor, gravely, as we went our way, "whatever you may think of what has passed to-day, say nothing. I am not so ignorant of the wrongs of that poor boy as I appear to be; but there is nothing for it but patience."

CHAPTER VI.

HEAD OVER HEELS.

I OBEYED my tutor and my friend in keeping all I knew regarding Sir Massingberd to myself; but the knowledge weighed heavily upon my spirits for several days. Soon, however, my mind recovered its youthful elasticity. I began to think that Marmaduke's morbid disposition had perhaps exaggerated matters; that the baronet was not so black as was painted; that my friend would soon be his own master; and, in short, I laid all that flattering unction to my soul which is so abundant in the case of the misfortunes of others, and so difficult to be procured when the calamity is our own. Moreover, in a few days I was in possession of an excellent horse, and there is nothing more antagonistic to melancholy—especially when it is vicarious—than a good gallop. Nay, more, after a little, Marmaduke had a horse also. He came to call for me, that we should go out for a ride together the first day, and I shall not easily forget it. How handsome and happy he looked! As if the high-conditioned animal he bestrode had imparted to him some of his own fire and freedom, he wore scarcely any trace of his habitual depression. "This is our 4th of July," said he, gaily; "my day of independence, as the rebels say!"

It happened to be his birthday also, he was seven-

teen, so that all things conspired to make it a gala-day. My tutor, who was a judge of horseflesh, examined the new steed with great attention. "He is superb," said he, "and you sit him, Marmaduke, considering your scanty experience, like a young centaur. No one could imagine that your equestrianism had been heretofore limited to a keeper's pony; and, moreover, Oliver's ponies are not apt to be very high-couraged. But what a tight curb has this Bucephalus! He will not give you much trouble to hold him. So-ho, so-ho, my nag! Are you a hypocrite, then, that you need be so alarmed at being inspected?" The sleek bay plunged and curveted, so that my own sober brown began to dance in rivalry. "By-the-bye," continued Mr. Long, as though a sudden thought had struck him, "I have occasion to visit Mr. Jervis of the farm at Staplehurst some day this week: if it is the same to you, let us go there to-day; it will be an object for your ride, while I shall have the pleasure of your company."

In a few minutes, my tutor's old white mare was brought round to the Rectory door by the gardener, who was groom and butler also, and we set out together at a foot's pace. Mr. Long never took his eyes off the bay, and therefore did not observe Sir Massingberd, who, with his huge arms resting on a gate by the roadside, watched us pass with a grim smile. "Well, parson," exclaimed he—and at the sound of his voice I perceived my tutor start in his saddle—"what think you of the little Londoner?"

"I cannot say at present, Sir Massingberd," returned my tutor with deliberation. "He is a beauty

to look at; and if he has no vice, is a bargain at five-and-thirty pounds."

"Vice! Why should he have vice, man? A child might ride him for that matter. I got him with the best of characters. But you'll never teach those lads to ride if you are always at their stirrup-leather, like this. Let them ride alone, and race together. Don't treat them like a brace of molly-coddles. Why, at their age, I could have backed any horse in Christendom without a saddle. I wonder you don't give Miss Marmaduke a leading-rein."

The colour, which had faded from the lad's cheeks, returned to them again at this sneer; but Mr. Long only remarked: "If you had had a leading-rein yourself, Sir Massingberd, at seventeen, it would have been a great deal better for you," and rode on without the least consciousness, as I believe, of having made any such observation.

When we had advanced about a mile, and had left the village quite behind us, my tutor expressed a wish to change horses with Marmaduke.

"I want to try his paces," said he; and certainly, if he had been a horsebreaker by profession, he could not have taken more pains with the animal. He trotted, he cantered, he galloped; he took him into a field, and over some fences; he forced him by a windmill in full work; and, in short, he left no means untried to test his temper. In the end, he expressed himself highly satisfied. "Really," said he, "Sir Massingberd has got you a first-rate steed, with plenty of courage, yet without vice; he makes me quite dissatisfied with my poor old mare."

The next day, and the next, we rode again with-

out my tutor; and on the fourth day it was agreed that we should take an expedition as far as Crittenden, some ten miles away, where Mr. Long wished us to do some commissions for him. By this time, Marmaduke was quite accustomed to his recent acquisition; enjoyed the exercise greatly; and since Sir Massingberd was much engaged with his guests, passed altogether more agreeable days. On the afternoon in question, the Hall party were out shooting, and had taken with them all the stable domestics except a raw lad who scarcely knew how to saddle a horse.

“I cannot think what is the matter this afternoon with ‘Panther’” (we so called his skittish animal), exclaimed Marmaduke, as he rode up to the Rectory door. “I could scarcely get him to start from the yard, and he came here mostly upon his hind-legs. Is there anything wrong with his girths, think you? Ned did not know where to lay his hands on anything, and my uncle has taken William with him to ‘mark.’”

“Nay,” said I, “I see nothing the matter. We will soon take off his superfluous energy over Crittenden Common.”

Long, however, before we reached that spot, we had had galloping enough and to spare. Twice had Panther fairly taken the bit between his teeth (as the romance writers term it, and Heaven forbid that a mere sportsman should correct them), and sped along the hard high-road at racing pace; and twice had Marmaduke, by patience and hard pulling, recovered the mastery, albeit with split gloves and blistered hands. It was not enjoyment to ride in this

fashion, of course; and had it not been for the commissions which had been entrusted to us, it is probable that we should have returned home. It puzzled us beyond measure, to account for the change of conduct in the bay. The difference was as decided as that between a high-spirited child who requires, as we say, "careful treatment," and a vicious dwarf. Heretofore he had been frisky, now he was positively fiendish. He shied and started, not only at every object on the road side, but before he arrived at them. At the end of the high-table land, which is called Crittenden Common, and descends into the quiet little market-town of the same name, there really was something to shy at. A gipsy encampment, with fire and caldron, and tethered donkey, which had been concealed in a hollow, came suddenly into view as we cantered by; an old crone, with a yellow handkerchief in lieu of a bonnet, and shading her beady eyes with her hand, watched with malicious enjoyment the struggle between man and horse, which her own appearance had gone far to excite. In a very few moments Marmaduke's already overtaxed muscles gave way, and the bay, maddened with resistance, and released from all control, rushed at headlong speed down the steep chalk-road that led by many a turn and zigzag into Crittenden. It was frightful to watch from the summit of this tamed precipice—this cliff compelled into a road—the descent of that doomed pair. No mule could be surer-footed than was Panther, but the laws of gravitation had nevertheless to be obeyed. At the second turning the bay, after one vain effort to follow the winding of the road, pitched head first down the grassy wall which every-

where separated the zigzags from one another; over and over rolled horse and rider to the hard road below, and there lay, their horrible and abnormal movements exchanged for a stony quiet. I jumped off my horse and ran down the two steep slopes, which at another time I should have descended hand over hand. Yet on my way I had time to think with what sorrow this news would be received at Fairburn Rectory, with what joy at the Hall! Marmaduke's land still held the rein, which I disentangled from it with feverish haste, lest that four-footed fiend, which snorted yet through its fiery nostrils, and glared defiance from its glazing eyes, should arise and drag the dear lad's corpse among the cruel stones. After what I had seen of his fall, I had scarcely a hope that he was alive. There was blood at his mouth, blood at his ears, blood everywhere upon the white and dazzling road. "Marmaduke, Marmaduke," cried I, "speak, speak, if it be but a single word! Great Heaven, he is dead!"

"Dead! no, not he," answered a hoarse, cracked voice at my ear. "He'll live to do a power of mischief yet to woman and man. The devil would never suffer a Heath of Fairburn to die at his age."

"Woman," cried I, for it was the old gipsy crone, who had somehow transported herself to the spot with incredible speed, "for God's sake go for help! There is a house yonder among those trees."

"And why should I stir a foot," replied she, fiercely, "for the child of a race that has ever treated me and mine as though we were dogs?"

"Because," said I, at a venture, "you have children yourself."

"You are right," exclaimed she, clapping her skinny hands together, and seating herself calmly on the turf. "It is well that you have mentioned my kith and kin. One lad is across the seas, and will never see the green lanes and breezy commons of England more; another lies caged in yonder jail, and both for taking the wild creatures of the earth and air to which such men as Massingberd Heath lay claim; while my little sister—ah, my Sinnamenta, my fair pearl!—may the lightning strike him in his wickedest hour! nay, let him perish, inch by inch, within reach of the aid that shall never come, ere the God of the Poor takes him into his hand! Boy, you may talk to that flintstone, and it will rise up and get you help for that lad there—bonny as he is, and the bonnier the worse for them he sets his wilful eyes on—before you get this hand to wag a finger for him."

"Woman," said I, despairingly, "if you hate Massingberd Heath, and want to do him the worst service that lies in your power, flee, flee to that house, and bid them save this boy's life, which alone stands between his beggared uncle and untold riches."

"Is it so?" cried the old woman, rising up with an agility for which no one would have given her credit, and looking at me with furious eyes. "Is it indeed so, boy?"

"Yes, woman, upon my soul!"

Revenge accomplished what pity had failed to work. In an instant, she was with me down by Marmaduke's side; from her pocket she produced a spirit-flask in a leathern case, and applied it to his

lips: after a painful attempt to swallow, he succeeded; his eyelids began tremulously to move, and the colour to return to his pallid lips.

“Keep his head up,” cried she, “and give him another drop of this, if assistance does not arrive within five minutes.”

Before she had finished speaking, she had lifted the latch of the gate that opened from the road into the grounds of the house in question, and in another instant I was alone—alone with what I believed to be a dying man, and surrounded with the blood that had flowed in a mingled stream from him and the dead horse, for Panther had ceased to move—alone with recollections and anticipations scarcely less horrible than the visible scene; and yet, so strangely constituted is the human mind, that I could not forbear to glance with some sort of curiosity at the flask the gipsy had left with me, and to wonder exceedingly that its worn and tarnished top of silver bore upon it a fac-simile of one of those identical griffins which guarded each side of the broad stone steps that led to Fairburn Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE DOVECOT.

AFTER an interval, which doubtless appeared much longer than it really was, there issued from the gate a groom and butler, bearing between them a small sofa, and accompanied by a young and lovely girl. The scene that presented itself was enough to shock persons even of strong nerves, and I hastily exclaimed, "The young lady had better not see this." But she came on nevertheless.

"I am not afraid of blood," said she, "and perhaps I may be of use." Then she directed her servants how to handle the wounded man ; and when he was gently lifted on to the couch, she applied a handkerchief dipped in Eau-de-Cologne to his forehead, and walked by his side regulating the pace of his bearers, like some Miss Nightingale of a generation and a half ago. "Let him be placed in your master's room, James : and then take my pony, Thomas, and ride as fast as you can for Dr. Sitwell ; and as you come back—but think of nothing but bringing the doctor first—call at the nursery-garden for your master ; he said he should go there about those roses." And some other directions she gave, as the men moved on with their ghastly burden, like one who knew the value of time. Notwithstanding this presence of

mind, her anxious eyes betrayed that she was not wanting in sensibility, and with every groan which the motion of the litter extracted from the sufferer, her own lip quivered. I dare say that I saw nothing of her exceeding beauty at that dreadful time ; but while I write of Lucy Gerard now, a vision of surpassing loveliness perforce presents itself before me. A tall, lithe, graceful form ; a face, nay, rather a soft, sad smile overspreading and pervading every feature—a smile that I never saw surpassed save on her own fair countenance after Love had taken her sweet soul captive—a smile the reflex of all good and kindly thoughts that dwelt within. There are some so great and noble that they smile, where other good folks can only weep and wail ; the true sympathizer with human griefs wears no lugubrious aspect ; the angels smile when they weep over human wretchedness—they know that it is only for a little while, for that the gates of heaven are standing open very, very near ; and some such knowledge, or happy faith, seems to influence the best of mortals, or how should they go smiling through this world ?

So Marmaduke was carried along the gravel-drive, and across a little flower-studded lawn, to the room in Mr. Gerard's house which was called the master's room, it being half a sleeping-chamber, and half a library, which Lucy's father used both night and day. This was so evident from the appearance of the place, that when I had, with James' help, put Marmaduke to bed there, where he lay breathing heavily, but quite unconscious, I went to the young lady of the house, and expressed my apprehension that my poor friend, being in that apartment, would cause additional inconvenience in the household.

"I understand," said I, "that it is Mr. Gerard's room."

"Ah, sir," said she, with a glance of pride more becoming, if that were possible, than even her ordinary modest look, "you do not know my father. When I say that it will give him the greatest pleasure to find that his favourite room has been of service to your friend, I use a conventional phrase which literally expresses what he will feel. Please to forget that there is anybody in this house but yourselves; it is only right that sickness should be considered before health; though, alas! every room to those who are ill is but an hospital. This little drawing-room, which your glance tells me you think pretty, with its conservatory and fountain, and the rest, my poor young sister was very, very weary of, before she died, on yonder sofa, after fourteen months of the gay prison."

Her voice trembled as she spoke, and I thought I detected in it that shade of bitterness with which some affectionate persons speak of the sufferings of those they love, as though they would almost arraign that Providence for unnecessary harshness, which might inflict any misery upon themselves without evoking one impatient thought.

"Then you are left all alone here, Miss Gerard. With such a sad reminiscence, this spot must——"

"Alone!" interrupted she, with astonishment. "What! when I have my father? See, he is coming through the shrubbery now, and Dr. Sitwell with him. Let us meet them. How glad I am that he has lost no time."

It was easy to distinguish the doctor, with his

cane, his ruffles, and stiff, professional appearance, a little impaired, however, by hot haste ; moreover, his companion indicated him with his finger as we rapidly approached one another, exclaiming, "This is your man, young gentleman ; don't waste one word on me at present."

So, rapidly detailing what had happened as we went, I took the man of physic to Marmaduke's bedside. As we entered the room, and first caught sight of his pale features distorted with pain, my companion stood for an instant aghast. "Great Heaven !" murmured he, "I thought the horse had trodden upon the poor lad's forehead ; but now, I see it is an old scar."

"No," returned I ; "it is not a scar ; it is only a mark which in moments of pain or anger comes out more distinctly than at other times. All the Heath family have it. This is Mr. Marmaduke Heath, the nephew of Sir Massingberd."

"Indeed—indeed, sir !" exclaimed the doctor, with an accession of sympathy. "Dear me, how sad ! What a fine property to risk losing at his time of life. But the eye, you see, gives us hope ; the brain has suffered but slightly. He has not been sick, you say—not been sick ; he has not been sick, sir."

It was the worthy doctor's habit to reiterate his last sentence in an arrogant manner, as though he had been contradicted on a matter of fact, while in reality his mind was entirely occupied by quite other thoughts. Thus, at the present speaking, he was engaged in manipulating Marmaduke's head, and examining his ribs and limbs with the greatest attention. I waited for his verdict in anxious silence, and

presently it was delivered. "It is my opinion, sir, that the young man will live to be a baronet."

Life and Death, the immortalities of Heaven and Hell, were matters that had but small space in Doctor Sitwell's mind compared to this all-important futurity; he was accustomed to *them* in connexion with the merest paupers and persons of no sort of consequence; but it was not every day in the week that a gentleman of Marmaduke's condition was pitched on his head within the Crittenden doctor's professional orbit.

"Mr. Marmaduke Heath must be kept perfectly quiet; he must not be moved from hence upon any consideration—it may be, for weeks. What science can do, through my humble agency, shall be done for the young gentleman; but rest and quiet are essential. Sir Massingberd should be sent for instantly; the responsibility upon my shoulders would otherwise be too great. He will doubtless yearn to be by the bedside of his beloved nephew. You had better arrange with Mr. Gerard for this being done, as I have my round to make, which to-day is all-important. The Hon. Mrs. Flinthert—widow of the late admiral, you know—she requires constant supervision; nature has to be supported; but for brandy, she must have sunk before this. Then Mr. Broadacres, who lives Fairburn way—by-the-bye, that is a very curious case. However, my post is here, of course, until my assistant arrives, who will remain in my absence. You may leave your friend now without the least anxiety. When he awakes to consciousness, you shall be sent for—you shall be sent for, sir."

Upon this, I returned to the drawing-room to give

a much more cheerful report of the patient's case than I had ventured to anticipate. I found our host issuing orders for his comfort and attendance, as though he had quite made up his mind to make him his guest for a lengthened period. A noble-looking gentleman he was, as like his daughter as an old man can be to a young girl. Harvey Gerard's face was wrinkled neither by years nor care, though marked here and there with those deep lines which indicate the Thinker—one whom the gods have placed above the drudgery of life, with a disposition to philosophize—a man among men rather than of them, who stands apart from the high road somewhere half-way up the hill of Fortune, and watches the toilers above and below with a quiet but not cynical smile. "The news you bring me of our patient, Mr. Meredith," said he, "is most welcome; but I think we should still lose no time in communicating with his friends."

"That is also the opinion of Dr. Sitwell, sir; he, too, recommends that my poor friend's nearest relative should be sent for; but in circumstances of this kind, it would be wrong not to say at once that that relative and the invalid here are on the worst of terms, and that his coming would most certainly aggravate any bad symptoms, and retard his cure."

"I am sorry to hear," returned Mr. Gerard, gravely, "that the young gentleman is not on good terms with his own flesh and blood; that is a bad sign."

"However that may be, sir, generally," replied I, with warmth, "it is not so in this instance. Mr. Long, the rector of Fairburn, and tutor to my friend, will certify to his being a most well-conducted and

excellent youth. His uncle, however, Sir Massingberd Heath——”

“I will not have that person under my roof, interrupted Mr. Gerard, “under any circumstances whatsoever.” This he said without the least trace of irritation, but with a firmness and decision which left me nothing to apprehend upon Marmaduke’s account. Then turning to his daughter, as if in explanation, he added, “The man I speak of, my love, is a wicked ruffian, worse than any poor fellow who has ever dangled yonder outside of Crittenden jail.

Miss Gerard did not answer except by a look of gentle remonstrance, which seemed to me to murmur, “But, dear papa, for all we know, this gentleman may be a friend of his.”

I hastened, therefore, to observe with energy, that Mr. Gerard’s view of the baronet’s character was a perfectly just one, as far as I knew, or, if anything, rather lenient. I recommended that Mr. Long should be apprised of what had happened, and that he should give Sir Massingberd to understand that while his nephew was receiving every attention at the Dovecot, for so I had learned the house was called, its doors were immutably closed against himself. It was not a pleasant task to impose upon the good rector, but it was a necessary one; for independently of Mr. Gerard’s determination, I felt it was absolutely essential to Marmaduke’s life that his uncle should be kept away from his bedside. If in health his presence terrified him, how much worse would it be for him in his prostrate and perilous condition! It was arranged, too, that I should remain to look after my sick friend, and the messenger was instructed

to bring back with him all that we required from the Rectory and the Hall. Mr. Long arrived at the Dovecot late that same afternoon, in a state of great anxiety. He had come away almost on the instant after receiving the news of Marmaduke's mischance, and without seeing Sir Massingberd, who had not yet returned from shooting; but he had left a letter for him, explaining the circumstances as well as he could. "My only fear," said he, after visiting his pupil, who still lay in a lethargic slumber, "is that he will come here immediately, and insist on seeing his nephew—a desire that would appear to be natural enough to persons who are unacquainted with the circumstances."

"Nay," said I; "but surely he cannot do this in the face of Mr. Gerard's prohibition?"

"Ah, my boy, you do not know Sir Massingberd yet," observed my tutor, gravely; "he will come where and when he will."

"Nay," returned I; but neither do you know Mr. Harvey Gerard. From what I have seen of that gentleman, he understands how to say 'No,' and to suit to the word the action. When the strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods, including his sick guest, are in peace."

"But where a stronger than he cometh," added the rector, shaking his head, "what then?"

"We shall see," said I, "what will happen. It is plain, at all events, that our host is well aware of the sort of man with whom he has to deal. Mr. Gerard is a most pleasant person, and his daughter is charming beyond measure: they are far the most interesting people I have yet seen about Fairburn.

How is it I have never heard any mention of them?"

"The Gerards have always lived a very retired life," returned my tutor. "The old gentleman entertains, it is said, some strange opinions. In fact, I have never met them myself but once, and that on some public occasion; so you must introduce me, Peter."

I had been watching for Mr. Long at the entrance-gate, and taken him straight into Marmaduke's room upon his arrival, so that he had seen neither our host nor hostess; and I thought it strange that my tutor did not speak of them with more enthusiasm, after their great kindness to Marmaduke; something evidently a little chilled his feelings towards them. When he and Mr. Gerard met, I thought there was more cordiality upon the part of the latter than of the former; the expression of Mr. Long's gratitude was earnest, but not genial. His admiration of Miss Lucy, although not to be concealed, was mitigated, as it seemed, by some sort of compassion; he regarded her with a shade of sadness. Boy as I was, it was evident to me that some antagonism existed between my host—for whom I naturally entertained most kindly feelings—and my respected tutor; and this troubled me more than I should have liked to say.

Miss Lucy presently left the drawing-room, and then I was continually appealed to by one or the other, on various trifling matters, as though they found a third party a relief to their conversation. At last Mr. Long requested me to narrate particularly the circumstances of Marmaduke's accident, and I did so, down to the period when I found him bleeding on the road.

"Well," observed my tutor, "I am totally at a loss to account for poor Panther's behaviour. I confess, upon the first day I saw him, I did not like the look of his eye: you remember, Peter, that I made Marmaduke exchange horses with me, and endeavoured, by every means in my power, to find out the peculiarities of the animal. I wish Sir Massingberd had permitted me to choose a horse for his nephew myself, when I bought your honest brown."

"Sir Massingberd selected his nephew's horse himself, did he?" inquired Mr. Gerard, carelessly.

"Yes," replied my tutor; "he sent for him from town a few weeks ago. He was a mettlesome, frisky creature, it is true; but his curb was a very powerful one, and seemed quite sufficient to subdue him."

"Does Sir Massingberd himself ride when he is in the field?" observed our host. "He must be a great weight for a shooting pony."

"Well, if you had asked me yesterday, I should have said he almost never rides; but it so happens that he did take the keeper's nag with him this morning. His great stables are all empty now, for, as probably you are aware, things are not kept up as they used to be at the Hall. Old Dobbin is the only representative of the magnificent stud that was once maintained there, now that Panther is dead. By-the-by, what has been done with him?"

The carcass has been taken into the town," said Mr. Gerard. "He must have been a fine creature."

"His mouth, however, was of iron," said I. "Poor Marmaduke had no control over him whatever, at last; he had almost pulled his arms off."

"Notwithstanding the powerful bit?" observed Mr. Gerard.

"Yes," replied my tutor; "the bit was not only powerful, I should have almost called it cruel; but Sir Massingberd is a very good judge of all things belonging to a horse, and seems to have known that, at all events, no less was required. It was a town-made article, and came down from London with the animal."

"Ah, indeed," remarked Mr. Gerard. "But you have never told us, Mr. Meredith, how you managed to give the alarm here, without leaving your poor friend."

I am ashamed to say I had never given the old gipsy crone a thought from the moment that help arrived, although it was of her sending.

"The very woman whose appearance frightened the horse, repaired, as far as she could accomplish it, that mischief. She left in my hands, too, this fine old case-bottle, of which I should be sorry to rob her; and very curious is it that it has the Heath griffin, or some crest very like that, upon its stopper."

"It is the very crest," said the rector. "I am quite sure of that, although it is long since it last saw plate-powder. It is but too likely that the dark lady came wrongfully by it."

"Let us not be hasty to impute crime," observed Mr. Gerard, gravely. "This is a shooting-flask carried about the person; and gipsies are rarely pickpockets. When the owner is at home, it lies in some place of safety; and gipsies are not burglars."

"Able reasoned," observed Mr. Long. "It may, however, have been a case of 'findings, keepings,' as

the school-boys say. I should think the Cingari claimed for themselves all flotsam and jetsam."

"It is too heavy, and has too much bulk, not to have been missed by him who carried it as soon as it fell," continued Mr. Gerard, taking up the flask. "It has but very little spirit left in it—see—and yet how——"

Here the butler entered somewhat hurriedly, and was about to speak, when a figure brushed by him, and set him aside. The daylight was beginning to wane; but it was impossible to mistake that Herculean form, and its irresistible motion, even if I had not heard the hard, decisive voice of Sir Massingberd saying, "By your leave, sirrah; but in this good company I will announce *myself*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MEETING HIS MATCH.

SIR MASSINGBERD'S unlooked-for entrance into the drawing-room at the Dovecot had a result that must seem almost farcical to those who read it, but which to me, who dwelt among his trembling vassals, and had learned, day by day, to fear and hate him more and more, had nothing in it extraordinary. I, Peter Meredith, bolted straightway into the conservatory, and there ensconced myself within the shadow of an orange-tree, while the Rev. Matthew Long left the room with equal celerity by the door. As for me, I confess that I was actuated by panic on my own account; my tutor's apprehensions were aroused on behalf of another. The instant after he disappeared I heard the lock of the library door shot into its staple, and knew that Marmaduke was in a friend's keeping, and safe from any incursion of his uncle. I could see that Mr. Gerard knew this too, for a gleam of pleasure passed over his face, and then left it determined, defiant, and almost mocking, as when he had first set eyes upon the intruder. There was a fire in the otherwise darkening room, and from my place of concealment, I could watch the lineaments of both its inmates—and two more resolved and haughty countenances I had never beheld.

“Is it the custom of your respectable family, Sir

Massingberd Heath," observed my host, "to force themselves into houses whose owners do not desire the honour of their presence?"

"It is their custom to hold their own, sir," answered the baronet curtly; "and I am come after my nephew."

It is impossible to convey the effect which this audacious speech had upon me, its unseen hearer; unblushing, scornfully open as it was, an awful threat seemed to lie within it, and above all, a consciousness of the power to carry it into effect. Even Mr. Gerard, who could have had no knowledge of the things that I knew, and had never heard the history of Grimjaw, seemed to feel a tremor as he listened.

"Your nephew, sir, is not in a condition to receive you," returned my host. "The consequences of seeing you might, I do not hesitate to say, be fatal to him."

"The opinion of his medical man is different," observed Sir Massingberd with a sneer. "Dr. Sitwell—a most estimable person, I should say, and endowed with excellent sense—has been so very kind as to ride over himself to Fairburn as soon as he could leave his patient, in order to apprise me exactly how the matter stands. He recommends my seeing Marmaduke in his first lucid interval.—‘There is no knowing,’ said he, ‘whether that may not be your poor dear nephew’s last.’"

"Your poor dear nephew," repeated Mr. Gerard, with great distinctness. "Very dear, doubtless, but not what one would call poor, at least in the matter of expectations."

"Poor or rich, sir," retorted the other, "he has been placed in my hands as being those most fitted to take care of him."

Mr. Gerard shrugged his shoulders, and smiled sardonically.

"You seem to conceive that confidence misplaced, sir," continued the baronet. "The want of your good opinion afflicts me beyond measure. I am aware that I fail to satisfy pious persons in some particulars, but that Mr. Harvey Gerard's susceptibilities should be offended is indeed a serious consideration; it is as though the devil himself should cry, 'For shame!'"

"Sir Massingberd Heath, you are under my roof, although unbidden and unwelcome," returned my host; "your tongue, therefore, is chartered, so far as I am concerned. I could not, I confess, help my countenance expressing some astonishment when you spoke of your fitness for the education of youth."

There was a pause here for which I could not account. Sir Massingberd's eyes were riveted upon something on which the firelight danced and shone. I should very much misrepresent the baronet's character, and probably even exaggerate his capabilities, if I said he blushed, but certainly his countenance changed. Then he broke out fiercely, "I live as I choose, sir, and am answerable to no man, least of all to you. The parsons had their say, and have got their reply long ago, but am I also to be arraigned by——"

"You cannot justify yourself by any quarrel with me," interrupted Mr. Gerard. "I have, as you say, although not for the foolish reason you would mention,

no right to be either your judge or accuser. But, Sir Massingberd, there is a God whom we have both good cause to fear."

"So you make your own sermons, I perceive," exclaimed the other, bitterly. "That is the reason, is it, why the good folks never see you at church? Cant amuses me always; but religion out of your mouth is humorous, indeed. Pray go on, sir, if my dear nephew can wait a little, for I should be sorry to miss him altogether. You were affirming, I think, the existence of a God."

"I was about to urge," continued Mr. Gerard, with grave severity, "since howsoever persons differ on religious matters, they generally acknowledge a common Father, that if there is one crime more hateful to Him than another, it is the deliberate debauchery of the mind of youth. I had no intention of making any particular accusation, such as the sight of this flask seems to have suggested to you. I know nothing—but what I guess—of its history. It has only been in my hands a very few minutes. The person by whose means it came into this house was, I believe, an old gipsy woman, and you are, doubtless, well aware how it got into her possession."

Mr. Gerard paused. Sir Massingberd, who, though smiling scornfully, had been beating the ground with his foot, here observed, with a forced calmness, "She is a liar; she is a thief, and the mother of thieves."

"Did she steal this flask?" inquired Mr. Gerard, regarding the other attentively. "It has your crest upon it. She did not. Good. It was then, I suppose, only a *gage d'amour* of yours."

A lurid light came over Sir Massingberd's evil face; for a moment I trembled for the man who dared to speak such words to him, but almost instantly he recovered his usual cruel calm.

"Your sagacity, Mr. Gerard," returned he, "is truly admirable. Is it the result of experience or intuition? or has this old, ginger-faced harridan made you her favoured confidant? With your fondness for all such vagabonds I am well acquainted."

"The reprobation of a man like you, Sir Massingberd, should be dearer than the praise of ordinary mortals; but this matter does not concern myself in any way."

The baronet muttered something between his set teeth.

"Pshaw! man," continued Mr. Gerard, with unutterable scorn; "think not to frighten *me*. I am stronger than you, because I am richer; you are as poor as those very vagabonds whom you despise; your very existence depends upon the alms of a stranger. That you are unscrupulous in your revenges, I do not doubt: but you would have to deal in Harvey Gerard with one who only uses honourable weapons with an honourable foe. If you did me or mine a mischief, I swear to you that I would shoot you like a dog."

The frame of the speaker shook with contemptuous passion. Defiant as was his language, it fell far short of the disdain expressed in his tone and manner. It was not in Sir Massingberd's nature to be overawed, but his truculent features no longer maintained their grimness—their cruel humour. He could not put aside a man like Gerard with a brutal

jest. I do not say that he was conscious of his own inferiority, but he knew that his opponent not only did not fear, but actually despised him. This was wormwood.

"I am ashamed," continued Mr. Gerard, after a pause, "to have lost my temper with you, Sir Massingberd, upon my own account. I wish to have nothing in common with you—not even a quarrel. We were speaking of this gipsy woman, and you called her thief and what not. Whatever may be her faults, however, it does not become you to dwell on them; but for her and her prompt assistance, your nephew would not at this moment be alive. Out of this very flask she administered to him——" So frightful an execration here broke from the baronet's lips that I anticipated it to be the prelude to a personal assault upon my host. Mr. Gerard, however, stood quietly stirring the fire, with his eyes fixed firmly but calmly on those of Sir Massingberd, just as a mad doctor might regard a dangerous patient.

"That is a very singular exclamation of gratitude," observed Mr. Gerard, sardonically, "to one who has just performed you—or at least *yours*—so great a service. It really seems as though you almost regretted that it *was* performed."

A look of deadly hatred had now taken the place of all other expressions on the baronet's face. It forgot even to wear its sneer.

"I have been insulted enough, I think," said he, with a calmness more terrible than wrath. "Even as it is, I shall scarcely be able to requite you, though be sure, I will do my best. But, with

respect to my errand, I am come here to see my nephew, and that I will do."

"That you shall not do, Sir Massingberd, so surely as this house is mine."

"And who shall prevent me?" exclaimed the baronet, contemptuously measuring his foe from head to foot.

"Not I, sir, indeed," returned Mr. Gerard; "but I will see that my servants put you out of doors by force," and as he spoke he laid his hand upon the bell.

"Before night, then, I shall send for Marmaduke, and he shall be carried back to Fairburn, which, after all, is his proper home, and be there nursed."

"Nursed!" repeated my host, hoarsely. "Nursed by the grave-digger, you mean."

Sir Massingberd turned livid and sat down; then, as one who acts in his sleep, he passed his handkerchief once or twice across his forehead. "How dare you speak such things to me?" said he, looking round about him. "To hear you talk, one would think that I had tried to murder the boy."

"I *know* you did," cried Mr. Gerard, solemnly, laying his finger upon the baronet's arm. "If your nephew Marmaduke dies, his blood is on your head."

"On mine! how on mine? How, in the name of all the devils, could I have hindered the lad's horse from running away with him?"

"I will tell you how. You might have suffered Mr. Long to purchase a horse for the boy, as he offered to do, and not have sent to London for a confirmed runaway."

"He rode it half a dozen times without any harm," replied Sir Massingberd sullenly.

"Yes, with a curb that would have tamed a wild horse fresh from the lasso. But when you took that curb for the keeper's pony, riding with gun in hand for the first time in your life—and sent your nephew forth upon that devil with a snaffle-bridle—nay, I have it yonder, sir—don't lie; you calculated that if what you wished should happen all would be laid to chance. A change of bridles is an accident like enough to happen; lads are thrown from horseback every day. See, I track your thoughts like slime. Base ruffian! rise; begone from beneath this roof, false coward——"

Sir Massingberd started up like one stung by an adder.

"Yes, I say coward! Heavens! that this creature should still feel the touch of shame! Be off, be off; molest not any one within this house, at peril of your life—murderer—murderer!"

Without a word, without a glance of reply, Sir Massingberd seized his hat, and hurried from the room. I felt some alarm lest he should make some violent effort to visit Marmaduke; but Mr. Gerard's countenance gave me comfort. He stood quite still, listening with grim satisfaction to the baronet's retreating footsteps.

They were heard for an instant striding along the floor of the hall, and then were exchanged for the sound of his horse's hoofs urged to speed along the carriage-drive. Sir Massingberd Heath had met for once with his match—and more,

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HARVEY GERARD.

So entirely engrossed had I been with the action and dialogue of the speakers in the preceding scene, that it scarcely struck me while it was going on that I had not paid for my place in the pit in the usual fashion, but was a mere eavesdropper under an orange-tree.

So soon as Sir Massingberd was really gone, however, I became conscious of the impropriety of my situation, and not wishing to own what I had done, I stole noiselessly out into the garden, and then re-entered the conservatory, and thereby the drawing-room, as though I had been out of sight and hearing all the time. It was not quite a chivalrous act ; but I do not think that the boys of my time, myself included, were quite so honourable and frank as Mr. Tom Brown describes those of the present day to be. There was something, moreover, about Mr. Harvey Gerard which told me he would have loathed a listener, nor would have been very ready to have accepted fear as any excuse for my conduct. He was a man of noble bearing, nearly six feet in height, and extremely well formed. He was dressed in a blue lapelled coat, light waistcoat and kerseys, and Hessian boots. These last I had not seen before upon any person, and I remember them well. I think

they were the most graceful covering for the leg that has yet been devised, although, I own, they may not have been so convenient as the modern knickerbockers. He wore his own grey hair—which was not very usual with persons of his rank of life—and rather long. His features were large, but handsome; and there was a kind of youthful blandness about them which gave his face a most agreeable expression in ordinary. When excited by passion, however, as I had lately seen him, his appearance greatly changed. His thin lips parted contemptuously, and showed his threatening teeth, while his blue eyes, gentle almost to dreaminess, became blood-streaked, and almost started from their sockets. As I now beheld him calmly kindling a lamp on the drawing-room table, no one could have been a greater contrast than himself to the man who had just driven Sir Massingberd Heath from the room with such a hail-storm of invective.

“Well, young gentleman,” exclaimed he, cheerfully, “the enemy is repulsed, you see, although, I confess, your friend the baronet is rather a formidable fellow. He’s uncommonly like *Front de Bœuf*. I daresay you have read the new romance of ‘*Ivanhoe*,’ have you not?”

“Marmaduke has, sir, I believe,” replied I; “but I am sorry to say I am no great reader.”

“That is not well, Mr. Meredith; youth is the time for reading. A knowledge of books, if they are sufficiently varied, is half-way towards the knowledge of men. It is true that a student may turn out a fool, because he may have been a book-worm; but the probability is greater of that misfortune befalling

one who has been 'no great reader.' I would not say so much, if you were older than you are, and had not plenty of time before you to redeem the past. There is nothing more contemptible than ignorance ; save, perhaps"—here he sighed—"than knowledge misapplied. What a dangerous villain would that man be, for instance, who has just been here, had his natural powers been cultivated by study. As it is, he rushes headlong, like the bull." Here he turned upon me gaily. "Did he ever toss you, my young friend ?"

"Well, sir," returned I, remembering that interview in the churchyard, "he bellowed at me once a little."

"Did he, my boy, did he ?—the cowardly brute ! Well, I've put a ring through his nose for a considerable time to come, I flatter myself, I *like* a bull-fight. I think I should have made a capital matador," cried Mr. Gerard, rubbing his hands and laughing.

"How did you—how did you manage to *ring* him, sir ?" inquired I, with hesitation, for I was curious to see whether Mr. Gerard would make me a confidant of what had passed.

"Oh, I watched him carefully—never took my eyes off him for a moment. When he was calm in his white malice, then I irritated him by waving my red flag—this silver-headed brandy-flask put him in a horrible rage. When he made his rushes, I stood aside, and let him go where he would. When he had exhausted himself, I stepped in, and gave him the steel. I wonder," soliloquized Mr. Gerard, aloud, as he slowly paced up and down the room—"I

wonder if it would be safe to give him the *coup de grace* !”

“But,” said I, “were you not afraid——”

“My dear young friend,” said my host, with seriousness, but placing his hand kindly upon my shoulder, “an honest man should never be afraid of a fellow-creature. ‘Fear God,’ it is written ; but even the king is only to be honoured.”

It is impossible to express the grave and noble air with which Mr. Gerard spoke those words: I felt such an affectionate awe of him from that moment, as no other person has ever inspired within me.

“But,” continued I, “supposing he had made a personal assault upon you: he is perfectly reckless, and a much more powerful man, I should think.”

“Very true, my young friend ; and indeed at one time I thought he would certainly have done it ; that was why I placed the poker in the fire. It would not have been a romantic action ; but so sure as he laid finger upon me, I would have played Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and ‘burned a hole in him one might put a kail-pat through.’ It would have given me genuine pleasure.”

“Burned a hole in Sir Massingberd ?” cried I aghast.

“Ay, that would I. As it was, I threatened him with my servants ; and had he ventured to force his way into yonder room, they should have flogged him, though he were ten times Sir Massingberd. Better men than he are often flogged for less offences. Did you hear of Admiral Flinthert’s funeral at Crittenden a month ago or so ? You did ; and I daresay you

were told that he was a good man and a brave sailor."

"So it was said, indeed, sir," replied I. "Mr. Long attended the funeral out of respect, and I believe a great number of gentlemen of the county."

"Yet, for all that, he was a bad man, and a coward," returned Mr. Gerard, his voice rising, and his blue eyes flashing with indignation. "One part of the naval creed—'to hate the French'—it is true, he did believe, and acted in that faith; but he omitted the other, and the more important, 'to hate the devil.' He loved and served the devil of his own arrogant passions; he made the men miserable over whom he ruled; his ship was called the 'Floating Hell.' When the carriage of the lord-lieutenant had driven away from the church, with all its load of sympathy—for there was nothing else inside it—and the county gentry were rolling homewards, congratulating themselves that they had paid due reverence to a gallant officer and a friend of order and good government, I will tell you what happened. The very evening those honoured remains were laid in their resting-place, a sailor called at the house of old Marks, the sexton, and begged to be shown the admiral's coffin. 'I have sailed with him for years,' said he, 'and I have made right away from Portsmouth on purpose to do this; and though I cannot see his face, I should like at least to look upon that which contains it.'

"Now, old Marks did not fancy unlocking the church, and descending into a damp vault; beside which, he had really no right to enter the last home

of the Flintherts without due occasion. So said he, 'I cannot admit you to where the admiral lies, and certainly not at this hour; it is as much as my place is worth.'

"Then the sailor, who was as fine and hearty-looking a man, said Marks, as need be, held up half a sovereign between his finger and thumb. 'I have been just paid off,' said he, 'and will gladly give you this for your trouble; while as for your scruples, why, don't you think the admiral's family here, and all his great friends who came to do him honour to-day, would be glad enough that a poor tar should pay a humble tribute to his memory?'

"'Well,' said Marks, regarding, I daresay, the half-sovereign rather wistfully, 'what you have just said seems certainly to alter the matter. I will take you to the church, and you shall see the coffin, for the vault is not yet sealed.'

"So they started with a lantern, and Marks was for going first to show the way, but the sailor went ahead, saying that he knew the road blindfold, for that he had been brought up in that neighbourhood, and knew it well.

"'Well,' said old Marks, 'I thought I recognized something about you, although you are much changed in the last twenty years. You are Will Moody, who got into trouble with Sir Wentworth Heath about poaching; only he couldn't quite prove it agin you.'

"'No,' returned the sailor; 'but he went to work by a surer way than even the law—he got me pressed when I went to visit my sister down at Deal.'

"That, my young friend," observed Mr. Gerard,

interrupting himself, "is a method by which not only we man our fleet, but rid the country of a number of obnoxious persons."¹

"‘Yes,’ continued the sailor, ‘I was pressed; if it had not been for that, I should not have sailed under Admiral Flinthert.’ He spoke no more till they had entered the church, and had moved away the stone, which had been only dropped, and not yet fastened over the mouth of the vault. Then they descended the steps, and old Marks turned his lantern on to the spot where the first—that is, the latest—coffin of the long row was lying. ‘That is the admiral’s,’ said he; ‘you may read his name upon the silver plate.’

"William Moody spelled it out aloud, so as to be quite sure. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘I will tell you a little story about that dead man, and then we will come away.’

"‘Tell us the story when we get home,’ replied the sexton.

"‘No, no, man; I will tell it here, else you would think ill of me, may be, for what I am going to do. Now listen. For a long time after I was pressed I hated and detested what I had to do, and also those who gave me my orders; but after a bit I got more used to the work, and some of the officers I learned to like very well, especially our captain. I was a strong, active fellow, without home-ties to think upon

¹ This sarcasm was founded on literal truth. I myself remember a time when Englishmen submitted to a system of oppression almost precisely similar to that which has of late driven the Poles to insurrection, and enlisted for them the sympathies of Europe—namely, a forced conscription, the subjects which are *selected*.

and sadden me; for mother had other sons to maintain her, and in that respect I was luckier than most. There were pressed men on board of the same ship, men, whose wives and helpless children were starving because their bread-winner was taken from them, and who knew not whether he was dead or alive. However, as I say, I soon got used to my new position, and became so good a sailor, that I was made what is called captain of the maintop. When our ship was paid off, which was not, however, for a long time, I liked the salt water so well, that after I had been home for a little, I volunteered to serve again.

“My next captain was this man, who lies here. He was as cruel a tyrant as ever trod a quarter-deck, and a terror to good and bad alike. You could never please him, do what you would. If an officer is worth his salt at all, he knows and respects those men who do their duty well under him. Captain Flinthert knew, but did not respect them; on the contrary, he behaved towards them as though he resented some imaginary claims on their part to his consideration. I held in his ship the same position that I held in the last, for it did not contain a more active sailor. Yet he found occasion—I should rather say he made it—to get me punished. I swear to you, that I had not committed even that slight fault which he laid to my charge; if I had done so, it was one for which the stopping of a day’s grog would have been chastisement enough. This ruffian’—here he smote the coffin with his clenched hand—‘ordered me three dozen lashes. Now, I had never been flogged yet, and when I went to the captain with almost tears in my eyes, and told him so, and that I

had never even been reported for misconduct, he replied with a sneer that I was too good by half, and that it was high time I should become acquainted with the cat-o'-nine tails. "To prevent mistakes, you shall have it at once," said he; "call up the boatswain's mate." Now, I thought to myself, in the pride of my manliness and independence, that such a disgrace should never happen to William Moody, but that I would die first; so I walked straight from that part of the deck where I had been speaking with Captain Flinthert, and leaped from the bulwarks into the sea. I believe I tried at first to drown myself, but I was a strong swimmer, and nature compelled me presently to strike out. The cry of "A man overboard!" had caused the boat to be lowered at once; and though we had been sailing very fast I was picked up, not much exhausted, and almost in spite of myself. As soon as I had got on board and put on dry things the captain sent for me on deck, where I found the boatswain's mate at the grating, and all hands piped for punishment. "William Moody," said that ruffian in a mocking voice, "I had ordered you three dozen lashes for a certain offence, but you have now committed a much graver one in endangering, by your late act, the life of one of his majesty's sailors; you will, therefore, now receive *six* dozen instead. Boatswain, do your duty."

"I was, therefore, tied up and punished. I don't think I suffered much at the time, although I was laid up in the sick ward for long afterwards. I was entirely occupied with thoughts of revenge. When I was able to get about again Captain Flint-hert had got another ship, and was away out of my

reach. I never met him again, or he would not have lived to the age that is inscribed on yonder plate; but as soon as I heard that he was dead, I swore to come and spit upon the tyrant's coffin.'

"Then the sailor suited the action to the word, and turned from the dishonoured corpse with a lighter step than that which he had approached it; and old Marks followed him from the vault, as he confessed to me himself, 'half frightened out of his wits.'"

"I do not wonder," said I to Mr. Gerard, "it was a terrible revenge."

"Ay, but how much worse was the provocation; from the very man, too, placed in authority over him whose duty was to foster, not to oppress him. Verily, they that are in honour, and understand not, are as the beasts that perish."

"True," returned I, "but then the wretch was dead."

"Just so, young sir," replied Mr. Gerard, impetuously, "was dead, and never felt the insult. The sailor felt both the insult and the lashes. How is it that, at your age, you have already learned to be the apologist of the rich in high places?"

"Nay, sir, I——?"

"Yes, *you*," continued my host with vehemence; "your pity is for the admiral, and does not descend to the captain of the maintop. Still," added he, in a milder tone, "I should not judge you harshly, even if you so judge others. You were brought up in India, were you not? where in the eyes of the cowering natives, to be white is to be powerful, and wise, and all in all—save to be good. Great heavens,

what a retribution is waiting for us there!" Again my host paced the room, but this time rapidly, wildly, and uttering exclamations like a sybil inspired by her god. "If the nabobs we see here are specimens of those who rule the East, Heaven help the ruled! What blindness, what infatuation! Do you know, young man, the very men that cause revolutions are the last to believe in them?" This was an observation so entirely beyond me, that I could only murmur that such was doubtless the case, although I did not remember having heard it remarked before. "It is so," continued Mr. Gerard, positively, "and it always has been so. It was so in France. I suppose you have always been taught to consider the French Republicans the vilest and wickedest of men, and the Revolution to be the mother that produced them at one monstrous birth. Yes, when the day of reckoning comes, and the ruin is undeniable, Democracy, forsooth, is blamed. The taunt is hurled—

“Behold the harvest that we reap
From popular government and equality!”
Whereas, in truth, 'tis neither these, nor aught
Of wild belief ingrafted on their names
By false philosophy, have caused the woe,
But a terrific reservoir of guilt
And ignorance, filled up from age to age,
That can no longer hold its loathsome charge,
But bursts, and spreads in deluge through the land.’

High truth embalmed in noble verse, yet no one heeds. The author of those lines, my friend, is the greatest poet in Great Britain, and has never possessed an income of a hundred pounds a year. They say that my Lord Castlereagh has thirty thou-

sand——. Stay, do you not hear wheels? That must be Sitwell's gig. I have not the patience to see him now. His sycophantic officiousness in fetching Sir Massingberd was too contemptible. How can a man who has two legs given him to stand upright upon, persist in grovelling through life upon all-fours?

‘Heaven grant the man some noble nook ;
For, rest his soul ! he'd rather be
Genteelly damned beside a duke
Than saved in vulgar company.’

Do you receive him, Mr. Meredith ; and tell him from me that it is no thanks to him that his patient is yet alive. Now that the siege is raised, I will just step in and see how the lad is getting on.”

My host had left the room only a few seconds when Dr. Sitwell entered it.

“My dear young friend!” exclaimed he, in an excited manner, “what on earth has happened to Sir Massingberd Heath? He very nearly rode me down ten minutes ago on Crittenden Common ; and when I inquired after his nephew, he replied—Well, I cannot repeat the exact words, because they are so excessively shocking. Why, he must be out of his mind with grief! I trust he did nothing impetuous, nothing that is to be regretted, here?”

“No, sir,” replied I ; “he did not, thanks to our good host, who withstood all his attempts to see his nephew. It was, however, most indiscreet of you to send him hither. Mr. Harvey Gerard was exceedingly annoyed by your doing so.”

“My dear young friend,” observed Dr. Sitwell, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, “Mr.

Harvey Gerard is annoyed at many things which would give most sensible persons a great deal of pleasure. He would as soon admit a rattle-snake within his doors as a man of title, unless, indeed, it be his friend, Sir Charles Wolseley. By the bye, it is to Sir Charles that my dear patient, Mr. Broadacres, is indirectly indebted for his wound. If Sir Charles had not convened that revolutionary meeting at Brangton, Mr. Broadacres would not have had to read the Riot Act, and eventually got shot by mistake by his own men. It is denied by the government, I perceive, that ball was fired by the troops at the first discharge; but between ourselves such was certainly the case; for I extracted the bullet from poor Mr. B. myself, and he has had to lie upon his face ever since. Good heavens, sir, what a position for a man whose family came in with the Conqueror!"

"Is this Sir Charles Wolseley then, of whom one reads so much in the papers, a friend of Mr. Gerard's?" said I. "I have heard Mr. Long remark that he was a very dangerous man."

"So he is, sir. He'll be hung some day, as sure as he lives. And the gentleman in whose house we stand is tarred with the same brush. It's terrible to think of. Why, do you know, Mr. Meredith, that Mr. Harvey Gerard goes the length"—here the doctor looked about him to be sure that we were alone, and placing his lips close to my ear, whispered solemnly, "of wearing a white hat!"

"Gracious goodness," returned I, "why shouldn't he? My father always wears a white hat in India."

"Yes; but *let me tell you this*, India is not England," observed the doctor, sagaciously. "A white hat

here is the badge of Radicalism, Republicanism, Atheism—I don't say that Mr. Gerard is a downright atheist, but he's a sectary, and that's nearly as bad. And hark ye, I know this for certain: the only reason why Henry Hunt himself is not hand and glove with our friend is this, that when Hunt was tried for his life for sedition, he came into the dock like a prudent man, with a black hat, and that is the one act of caution and good sense for which Mr. Gerard has never forgiven him."

CHAPTER X.

LOVE THE LIFEGIVER.

It was about four o'clock in the morning, or nearly twelve hours after his frightful fall, that Marmaduke Heath first woke to consciousness. Mr. Long and myself were passing the night in his apartment, which was a very roomy one, my tutor upon a sofa, and I in a comfortable arm-chair. I had begged that for that once at least it should be so, for I knew the dear lad would like to set his eyes upon me when he first opened them. Dr. Sitwell and his assistant both agreed that if he woke at all from his heavy stertorous slumber, it would be in his sane mind; and it was so. Mr. Long was asleep, but I had so much to think about in the occurrences and disclosures of the preceding evening, that slumber had refused to visit me.

I was as unused as happy youth in general is to sleeplessness. I did not know at that time what it is to lay head upon pillow only to think upon the morrow with a brain that has done its day's work, and would fain be at rest; or worse, only to let the past re-enact itself under the wearied eyelids; to watch the long procession of vanished forms again fill the emptied scenes, and yet to be conscious of their unreality. How different in this respect alone is the experience

of age and youth, and again of poverty and competence! A young man in tolerable circumstances, and who does not chance to be a sportsman, may never have seen the sun rise, that commonest of splendid spectacles to all men of humble station. For my own part, I had never done so in England until the occasion of which I speak, and I remember it very particularly. The weary time spent in listening to the various noises of the house, now to those consequent upon the retiring to rest of its inmates, and then to those more mysterious ones which do not begin till afterwards—the cricket on the hearth, the mice in the wainscot, the complaining of chairs and wardrobes, and the clocks, which discourse in quite another fashion than they do in the day. The slow hours consumed in watching the rushlight spots, first on the floor and then on the wall, and at last exchanged for the cool grey dawn, stealing in through cranny and crack, and showing my companions still in the land of dreams; later yet the drowsy crowing of cocks, and presently, as the light grows and grows, notwithstanding shutter and curtain, the indescribably welcome song of the early robin, the busy chirping of the house-sparrow, followed by the whole tuneful choir of birds; then the lowing of cattle in the distance, and the distant barking of the watch-dog, so strangely different from that sad and solitary howl with which the same animal breaks the awful stillness of the night. About four, I say, as I looked for the thousandth time towards Marmaduke's bed, I saw him sitting up, supporting himself on his elbow, and pushing his other hand across his brow, as if trying to call to mind where he was. In an instant I was

at his bedside. "Marmaduke, I am here," said I; "Peter Meredith."

"I am not at Fairburn Hall, am I?" asked he, in a hoarse whisper.

"No, Marmaduke, you are amongst friends."

"Then *he* is not here," gasped he—"nowhere near."

"He is miles away, my friend, and he will never come under this roof."

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven!" cried the poor boy, sinking back upon the pillow; it was only a dreadful dream, then. I shall die happy."

"You need not talk of dying, Marmaduke. On the contrary, let us hope you are about to begin a life unshadowed, natural, without fear."

"No, Peter, I must die. I feel that; but what is death to what I have been dreaming? Do you remember that poem which came down in the box of books, from Mr. Clint, last week, about a wretched man that was bound upon a wild horse and sent adrift in the Ukraine?" And then he repeated with some difficulty—

"How fast we fled away, away,
And I could neither sigh, nor pray,
And my cold sweat-drops fell like rain
Upon the courser's bristling mane,
But snorting still with rage and fear,
He flew upon his far career;
At times I almost thought indeed,
He must have slacken'd in his speed;
But no; my bound and slender frame
Was nothing to his angry might,
And merely like a spur became.'

Well, Peter, that was I. But instead of the wolves

which followed upon *his* track, it was my uncle Massingberd who followed *me*. He had chosen to kill me as Count Palatine would have killed Mazeppa, but he wanted also to see it done.

‘All through the night I heard his feet,
Their stealing, rustling step repeat.’

Great Heaven, I hear them now!”

“Nay, Marmaduke, it is only I, your old tutor,” said Mr. Long, tenderly, who had not been able to leave his sofa entirely without noise. “You must not give way to these fancies; you had a fall from Panther, that is all.”

“Ay,” returned the poor boy, “it *was* Panther, only I thought he was a wild horse, and not my pony at all.

‘But though my cords were wet with gore,
Which oozing through my limbs ran o’er;
And in my tongue the thirst became
A something fiercer far than flame;’

that was nothing; nothing to the knowledge that that man was close behind. Now that I am awake, I feel bruised from head to heel, my bones ache, my head seems as though it were about to burst, but that is nothing to——” the poor lad could not finish the sentence, but exclaimed with piteous vehemence, “do, Mr. Long, do promise me that I shall never see him more.”

“You shall never see him more, if I can help it,” returned my tutor, with unusual energy. “Yes, I think I can promise that you never shall.” I well knew that so cautious a man as Mr. Long would not have said so much without full warrant; it was

evident to me at once that he had heard from Mr. Gerard all that had passed between that gentleman and the baronet in the drawing-room, and was now determined to act with vigour in Marmaduke's behalf. Perhaps the coincidence of the lad's dream with what had in fact occurred, may have helped my tutor's decision, but now that he had once passed his word, I felt sure that he would stand by Marmaduke to the last.

The sick boy seemed to feel this too, for he uttered many expressions of gratitude and contentment, while he kept fast hold of his new protector's hand.

"But mind, Marmaduke, you must now make haste and get well, and not give way to despondency about yourself. I am going for the doctor, who is sleeping in the house, and whom I promised to call as soon as you awoke; and, Peter, don't you let him talk too much. For a boy like that to talk of death," added Mr. Long, aloud, as he drew on his slippers, "is to go half-way to meet it."

Marmaduke smiled feebly at this remark of his unconscious tutor's, and when he had left the room, observed, "There is no need of any doctors; this is my death-bed, Meredith, I know."

"Marmaduke," replied I gravely, "I will not listen to such dreadful things; it is wrong, it is wicked, it will do you harm."

"No, Peter, there is nothing dreadful in the thing I mean, and it seems to soothe me when I speak of it. Since I have been ill, I have had a sign that tells me I must go. We shall not grow up together to be friends through life, as we had planned. I shall

watch you perhaps—I hope I shall—and be happy in your happiness, but you will soon forget *me*. There will be a thousand things for you to think of; there have been such even now for you while *I*—it seems hard, does it not, Peter, that I should have grown up under the shadow of that man, and never felt the Sunshine? They say that boyhood is the blithest time of life, but I have never been a boy. I think I could almost tell him, if he stood here now, how he has poisoned my young life, and sent me to the grave without one pleasant memory to moisten my dying eyes. Yes, my friend, dying. I have seen a vision in the night far too sweet and fair not to have been sent from heaven itself. If there indeed be angel, such was she. They say the Heaths have always ghastly warnings when their hour is come, but this was surely a gentle messenger. I close my eyes and see that smile once more.”

“Has she hair of golden brown?” inquired I gravely, “and hazel eyes, large and pitiful, and does she smile sad and sweet as though one’s pain would soon be over?”

“That is she, that is she!” exclaimed Marmaduke eagerly, while from his heavy eyelids the light flashed forth as from a thunder-cloud; “oh, tell me who and what she is!”

“Her name is Lucy Gerard,” replied I quietly, “and we are, at this moment, in her father’s house.”

Marmaduke’s mention of her smile had revealed to me the secret alike of dream and vision. He must have been dimly conscious of the catastrophe that had occurred to him throughout, although he had confused himself, poor fellow, with Mazeppa, and the

daughter of our host with a vision from the skies. His eyes were now closed, and with features as pale as the pillow on which he lay, he was repeating to himself her name as though it were a prayer.

“Marmaduke,” said I, “we will talk no more, since it exhausts you thus; I hear Mr. Long returning with the doctor, be of good heart, and keep your thoughts from dwelling——”

“Yes,” interrupted he, as though he would prevent the very mention of that grisly king of whom he had been now conversing so familiarly, “I will, I will. It would indeed be bitter to die *now*.”

CHAPTER XI.

WOOING BY PROXY.

THE medical report of Marmaduke Heath was more than cheering; it was confident. "One of the very best features of that young man's case is this," said Dr. Sitwell, "he does not give way. Foolish youths of his age will sometimes, as it were, fall in love with Death, until it is absolutely close beside them, poor fellows, when they shrink from him like the best of us."

"You should rather say the worst of us, Dr. Sitwell," observed my tutor.

"Well, sir, as far as my experience goes," returned the doctor cheerfully, "and I have 'assisted,' as Mr. Gerard here will have it, at the demise of many persons of the very first respectability, few of us are apt to welcome death; the majority, contrary to what is vulgarly believed, pay him no sort of attention whatsoever."

"And yet," remarked Mr. Harvey Gerard slyly, "He came over before the Conqueror, and possesses a considerable amount of land all over the country."

"True, sir, true," replied the doctor gravely; "and those are attributes which should always command respect. With regard, however, to our young patient, he seems determined, notwithstanding his sufferings, to be cheerful, and bear up. I have told

him how essential it is to do so, and the young gentleman is most reasonable, I am sure. 'I do not want to die, I wish to live,' were his very words—a most satisfactory and sensible state of mind. Fairburn Hall—he did not say this, but I knew what was passing through his brain quite well—Fairburn Hall, and one of the oldest baronetcies in the kingdom, are something to live *for*—that is a great point in cases of this kind."

I am sure I felt thankful and glad to hear this account of my dear friend; yet I could not help wishing that Dr. Sitwell had been as correct in the cause of Marmaduke's clinging to life, as in the fact itself. For I too was stricken with love for Lucy Gerard, and would have laid down my life to kiss her finger tip. It is the fashion now to jeer at that which is called First Love, as though affection were not worth having until it has first exhausted itself upon a score of objects; nay, perhaps, the thing itself is as extinct as the Dodo. In my day, however, the Great Three-Hundred-a-Year Marriage-Question was not yet broached, and gentlemen did not complainingly publish their rejections at the hands of the fair sex in the *Times* newspaper. Nearly half a century has passed over my head since the time of which I write, and has not spared its snows, and yet, I swear to you, my old heart glows again, and on my withered cheek there comes a blush as I call to mind the time when first I met that pure and fair young girl.

The worship of a lad is never lasting, it is said, although I know not upon what authority—society so seldom permitting the experiment to be made, that

the *dictum* can hardly be established; but while it does last, at least, how clear and steady is the incense! how honest is the devotion! how complete the sacrifice! Since I have been an old fogey, it has been confided to me by more than one ancient flirt that they still experience a rapture when they chance to catch the affection of a boy. They are kinder to him than they are to older men; they let him down easy; they respect the infatuation which they themselves have long lost the power of entertaining. How delicious, then, must such a conquest be to a maiden of seventeen! I claim for myself the possession of no tenderer nor truer feelings than other lads, but I know that a queen might have accepted the heart-homage which I paid to Lucy Gerard. And never was fealty more disinterested. I have written down not a little to my discredit; let me then say this much in my own favour. From the moment that Marmaduke Heath spoke to me as he did, upon his bed of sickness, of our host's daughter, I determined within myself not only to stand aside, and let him win her if he could, but to help him by all means within my power. If he lived for her alone, should I endeavour to slay him? If a promise, however distant, of a bright and happy future seemed at length to be held out for him whose life had been so saddened and so bitter, should I strive to make it void? I could not *afford* to lose her; no. I would have given all that I had in the world to hear her whisper, "I love you;" I would have beggared myself, I say, for those mere words; but could *he*, poor lad, afford the loss of her so well?

Doubtless, in modern eyes, we both appear mere foolish victims of calf-love; green hobbardys-hoys,

dazzled with the first flutter of a petticoat. As for me, let it be so received, and welcome, although, my young male readers, this is to be said, You never saw Lucy Gerard. Otherwise you would wonder little at my—well, at my poor folly. But with respect to Marmaduke, it must be admitted that his was not an ordinary case. Although a boy in years, he had long been sitting on the shores of old romance, and had probably more of the divine faculty for love within him than all the ardent souls of five-and-thirty put together, who are at this moment turning their eyes about them for a suitable young person with whose income to unite their own. Since his mother died, he had scarcely beheld a virtuous woman, with the exception of dear Mrs. Myrtle, the housekeeper at the Rectory, whose appearance was calculated to excite respect rather than the sentimental emotions; and now he had suddenly been brought face to face with one whose equal for form and feature, for gentleness and graciousness, for modesty and courage, these eyes have never yet beheld. I have done. There shall be no more ecstasies, reader; an old man thanks you that you have borne with his doting garrulity even thus long.

Since the days of Earl Athelwold, and probably long before them, the wooing by proxy has been held to be a perilous undertaking; we cannot take the fingers of a fair lady within our own, and say, "This is not my hand at all," as though we were Bishop Berkeley; or still more, "This is somebody else's hand," which it manifestly is not. If credit is to be given to such protestations at all, there is no knowing where to stop; and yet we must be doing something

tender, or we are not performing our duty as deputy. But how tenfold are the dangers of this enterprise, when the delegate of another has at one time contemplated performing the mission in question upon his own account. Of this peril—although fully determined to speak a good word for Marmaduke—I was well aware; I even considered within myself whether it would not be safer, upon the whole, to return at once to Fairburn Rectory, lest I should do my friend an involuntary wrong. Yes, I was walking in the garden at the Dovecot after breakfast, considering this, when I came upon Lucy Gerard herself, and flight became impossible to me, being mortal. I was pacing a winding path that ran beside the lawn, but was hidden from it by a glittering wall of laurel, and lo! there she stood, unconscious of my advent, beside—what? a statue? a sun-dial? No, a rose-tree, striving upwards by help of a little cross of white marble. Her face was westward, so that the morning sun shone like a glory on the wealth of hair that rippled down her shoulders. Beside her indoor garments she wore only a little braided apron, full of pockets that held scissors, pruning-knife, the thing which is called “bass,” I believe, and other horticultural weapons; and on her head the tiniest straw-hat, with a brim obviously intended to shelter more than one—a perfect garden saint, and at her prayers! for while I looked she knelt upon the grass-border (to shake some insect from a rose I at first thought, or remove a faded leaf), and so, with bowed head, remained for several minutes. When she arose and saw me hesitating whether to advance or retreat, she blushed a little; but in her usual quiet tone, begged

me not to be disturbed. "You could not know that this is forbidden ground here. It was my fault, who ought to have told you; our own folks all know it, and so few guests ever come to the Dovecot that it never struck me, Mr. Meredith, to give you a Trespass notice."

"But since I am here, Miss Gerard, and the intrusion has been made—most innocently, I assure you—may I not be suffered to satisfy what, believe me, is not a mere vulgar curiosity?"

"I do not think," returned the young lady, with some hesitation, "that my father would object to your knowing our little secret. You are going to remain with us some time, he hopes, and—yes, I am sure you will respect what with us is held so secret. This cross and rose-tree are set above my little sister's grave. See, that is what we used to call her, LITTLE ELLA. She of whom I spoke to you in the drawing-room yesterday."

I daresay my stupid face exhibited more of astonishment than sympathy. No wonder, thought I, that the doctor called Mr. Gerard a sectary, and that Mr. Long was so cold and distant in his manner.

"You seem surprised, Mr. Meredith, that my father should have acted thus—should have placed the tomb of his dear child where he can always come to weep and pray at it, and not amid the long dank grasses in Crittenden churchyard. Is it so very rare a thing to bury those we love elsewhere, than in a churchyard?"

"I only know one other instance," said I, "and that is in the Heath family."

"Indeed," replied Miss Gerard gravely, moving

away as though not wishing to converse of ordinary things in that sacred neighbourhood. "I trust we have but little in common with *them*."

"Truly, I can scarcely imagine that you and they are of the same species," replied I, with irrepressible admiration; "you who do not even know what wickedness is."

"What! I? Oh, but I am sometimes very, very wicked, I assure you," replied Miss Gerard. She looked so serious, nay, so sad, that I could have taken up her little hand and kissed it, there and then, to comfort her. But would such a course of conduct assist poor Marmaduke? thought I, and fortunately in time.

"There is one of the Heath family," said I, "at all events, whose good qualities will go far to atone for the shortcomings of his adversaries, if he only lives to exercise them."

That, "if he only lives," I considered to be very diplomatic; it was enlisting a tender sympathy for his perilous condition to start with.

"Dr. Sitwell says that there is little danger," replied Miss Gerard quietly.

"I know better," observed I, confidentially; "his life or death hangs upon a thread, a chance."

"Good heavens! Mr. Meredith, what can you mean? The brain, we are assured, is quite uninjured."

"My dear Miss Gerard," returned I, "it is not his brain that is affected, it is his heart. His recovery, I am positively certain, depends upon you."

"Upon me, Mr. Meredith?" replied she, while a blush sprung from neck to forehead on the instant,

as though a white rose should become a red one—"upon *me*?"

"Yes, dear young lady; that is, upon you and your good father. This lad will find here, for the first time in his young life, peace and tenderness—a new existence, if you only choose, will expand around him, such as he has never even dreamt of. I do not ask you to be kind to him, for you cannot be otherwise than kind; but consider his sad condition—fatherless, motherless, and having for his only relative a wretch whose atrocity is unspeakable, what reason has he to wish for life? But you, you teach him to feel that existence has something else to offer than sorrow, and shame, and fear."

"Alas, sir, I am nothing," returned Miss Gerard. "But if your friend desires a teacher to whom fear and shame are unknown, and whom sorrow has rendered wise, not sad, he will find one in my dear father. Oh, Mr. Meredith, if you knew him as I know him, how tender he is as well as strong, you would go straight to *him*! What I have of help within me, if I have anything, is derived from him alone."

"There are some maladies," said I, "against which not the most skilful physician can avail without a gentle nurse to smooth the pillow. I am sure I need say no more, except to assure you that whatever kind offices you may bestow upon Marmaduke Heath, will not be wasted upon an unworthy object. He is most honourable, generous, warm-hearted——"

"And very fortunate," interrupted Miss Gerard cordially, "in having a friend to be thus enthusiastic for him in his absence!"

Her eyes sparkled with pleasure ; and she held out her hand frankly as she spoke. I took it, and pressed it for an instant. A shock of joy passed through my frame ; my whole being trembled with ecstasy. Passion took me by storm, and for one glorious moment held the very citadel of my soul ; but it was for the last time—believe me, Marmaduke, the last time in all my life. Fifty years have come and gone, with their full share of pleasure and pain, but have never brought a moment of bliss like that, nor such icy despair as the thought of thee, my friend, caused to succeed it !

I write not in self-praise. I was not so mad as to suppose that Lucy Gerard would have ever stooped to love Peter Meredith when once she had known Marmaduke Heath. If he had so endeared himself to *me*, a selfish boy, who knew not half his gifts, or, at least knew not how to value them—that I thus rudely broke my own brief love-dream for his sake, would he not draw *her* towards him, laden with all her wealth of heart and brain, as the moon draws the wave ! It was so afterwards ; but I knew it then, as though it had already been. Yet, Marmaduke—yet I gave you something—for it was all I had—when I laid at your feet, to form a stepping-stone for you, my own heart. You trod upon it, my dear and faithful friend—. But, thank Heaven ! you never knew that you did so.

I wonder whether Lucy ever knew ?

CHAPTER XII.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

ON the second morning after our arrival at the Dovecot, Mr. Long called me into the dining-room, where I found Mr. Gerard and another gentleman, who had come down by the night-mail, as I understood, from London. Although, I should think, not less than sixty-six years of age, he was dressed in the height of the then prevailing mode. He wore a snuff-coloured coat, the tails of which trailed from his chair upon the ground, whenever he was so fortunate as not to be sitting upon them; the brass buttons at his back were nearly as large as the handles of an ordinary chest of drawers. A bunch of seals, each about the size of that peculiar to the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, dangled from his fob. His pantaloons, which seemed to have shrunk in the washing, set off a pair of legs that were still not uncomely; but what was most remarkable in his costume was an enormous muslin cravat, which, in combination with the ruffles of his shirt, gave him the aspect of a pouting pigeon. Unaccustomed as I then was to the toilet of persons of distinction, Mr. Clint of Russell Square—for he it was—made a very strong impression upon me. As the family lawyer of the Heaths, and one who had always greatly interested himself in Marm-

duke, he had been sent for by my tutor to give his opinion as to what steps should be taken respecting the future disposal of the poor lad. I guessed by his grave face that he had been put in possession, not only of all that had happened through the agency of Sir Massingberd, but of all that had been designed to happen.

"If you have any doubt still remaining, Mr. Clint, as to the propriety of removing Marmaduke Heath from the custody of his uncle," observed my tutor, after introducing me to this venerable beau, "I think this gentleman can dissipate it. Now, Peter, tell us in confidence, what sort of footing do you consider your young friend and Sir Massingberd to stand upon—are they good?"——

"Stop, stop, Mr. Long," interrupted the lawyer, taking an enormous pinch of snuff from a silver box, and holding up his laden fingers in a prohibitory manner; "we must not have any leading questions, if you please. Mr. Meredith, it is most important that you state to us the truth, without mitigation or exaggeration. You heard your tutor's first inquiry, which was a most correct one. How does Mr. Marmaduke Heath stand with respect to his uncle?"

"Well, sir," said I quietly, "he stands, as it were, upon the brink of a deep river, with his back towards a person who is bent upon pushing him in."

A total silence ensued upon this remark. Mr. Long and Mr. Gerard interchanged very meaning glances.

"Very good," returned the lawyer coolly, administering half the snuff to his nose, and dropping the

other half among his shirt-ruffles. "That is a form of speech, I suppose, by which you would imply that Marmaduke is afraid of his uncle?"

"Very much," said I: "afraid of his life."

"And you have had no previous conversation upon this subject with either of these gentlemen—that is—you must forgive me if I press this somewhat hardly—they have never asked your opinion on the matter before?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"You are speaking, too, I conclude, from your own observation of course, from your own knowledge of Mr. Marmaduke Heath's sentiments and position, and not from any hearsay rumour?"

"I am perfectly convinced, Mr. Clint," returned I gravely, "that Sir Massingberd Heath wishes to get rid of his nephew, and that Marmaduke knows it."

"Then Sir Massingberd shall be gratified," observed Mr. Gerard with energy; "he shall get rid of him from this day."

"Stop, stop, my dear sir," interposed the lawyer. "Even supposing that all this is true, both the facts that I have received from you and Mr. Long, and the surmises entertained by this young gentleman, we are still only at the threshold of the matter. From the manner in which Sir Massingberd expressed himself when he wrote to me to demand the custody of the boy, and from his whole conduct since, I am certain that he will not give up his position as guardian without a severe struggle. We must steadily look our difficulties in the face. Supposing—having been assured of Marmaduke's convalescence—he should send a post-chaise over here next week, or

the week after, with a note, insisting upon his immediate return to Fairburn Park, what is to be done then?"

"I should send the post-chaise back again," returned Mr. Gerard calmly, "with the verbal reply, that Mr. Marmaduke was not coming."

"But suppose he wrote to Marmaduke himself?"

"The reply would come from me all the same, Mr. Clint."

"But if Sir Massingberd appeals to the law?"

"He dare not!" exclaimed my host; "his audacity, great as it is, stops short of that. If he did, as sure as the sun is shining, I would meet him with the charge of attempted murder."

Mr. Clint took out of his other coat-tail a second snuff-box, which he never made use of except in cases of great emergency. "You are prepared to go that length, are you?"

"I am, sir," returned Mr. Gerard firmly.

"You have not a shadow of foundation for such an assertion," pursued Mr. Clint reflectively. "The slander will be pronounced malicious; you will be cast in swinging damages."

"That is possible," remarked my host; "but there, nevertheless, will be such revelations of Sir Massingberd's mode of life, as may well cause the Chancellor to reflect whether Fairburn Hall is a fitting educational establishment for a minor."

"John Lord Eldon is not an ascetic——"

"I know it, sir," broke forth Mr. Gerard; "I am well aware that he is a heartless fellow, as dissipated, as dishonest,¹ and——"

¹ I am at a loss to understand why good Mr. Gerard should

"Sir," interrupted Mr. Clint with irritation, "I will not listen to such mad words. You may utter them, of course, in your own house, but not to me. This is the talk of those who would subvert all authority."

"They are not afraid to speak evil of dignities," murmured my tutor.

"I do not speak evil of dignities, my dear sir, but only of the rogues who fill them," exclaimed Mr. Gerard, laughing. "However, I beg your pardon, gentlemen; the remark escaped me quite involuntarily. You must be aware, however, Mr. Clint, that my Lord Eldon is not absolutely an ascetic."

"I was about to say, sir," observed the old lawyer stiffly, "that his lordship is not so tenderly alive to the necessity of moral training as some of his friends would wish, and he has a strong respect for natural authority. He might lean, therefore, towards Sir Massingberd's view of the question—with whom, indeed, he is personally not unacquainted—and might be induced somewhat to palliate his way of life."

"Sadder than orphans, yet not fatherless, are those in Eldon's keeping," murmured Mr. Gerard. "Still," continued he, in a louder tone, "the charge of attempted murder, Mr. Clint, would have this effect, that even if Marmaduke were re-consigned to his uncle's care—which Heaven forbid—the eyes of the world would be upon Sir Massingberd, and he would not venture to work him a mischief. In the meantime, it rests with us to take good care that he has not the chance of doing so."

have thus expressed himself concerning Lord Eldon, unless it were that Shelley's case may have just been decided about that time.

“And now,” resumed Mr. Clint, after a pause, “supposing that all is arranged thus far to repel Sir Massingberd’s claims, there is another matter to be considered. It would take long to explain the details of the case, but you must understand that the Heath property is very peculiarly situated. Sir Massingberd, who is in the enjoyment of it for life, cannot raise a shilling upon it; while Marmaduke does not possess a shilling, although the prospective heir of such vast wealth. They would be, in short, at present a couple of beggars—such is the naked fact—but for a certain arrangement of my own, with which nobody else had anything to do. A small annual sum is paid to Sir Massingberd for the maintenance of his nephew, and another, solely on the latter’s behalf, for that of the estate. It is a most beautifully intricate affair from first to last,” pursued the lawyer with unction: “here are two relatives, who mutually support one another, and have yet every reason—looking at the matter in a rather worldly way, of course—to wish each other dead. Sir Massingberd could borrow plenty of money, if the usurers were only confident that he had the power as well as the will to make away with his nephew. There would be even less difficulty under ordinary circumstances in procuring a loan for Marmaduke; but a delicate boy, whose uncle and guardian is bent upon putting a violent end to him—you see that renders the security so very slight. Altogether, it is certainly one of the nicest cases. It is not only a question of responsibility; there are always plenty of people ready to take any amount of *that* at a sufficient premium; but who will undertake the pecuniary charge of the lad if he is withdrawn from his uncle’s

roof? Sir Massingberd, of course, will never give up one tittle of the allowance intrusted to him to expend, except upon such compulsion as we should scarcely venture to employ. There are three years wanting to the boy's majority; and even when he has arrived at that, and should be willing to promise ample repayment, he may die before his uncle still, who has a constitution of adamant, when those who have maintained him may whistle for the money they have expended. The expression may be coarse," added Mr. Clint apologetically, "but I think it conveys my meaning."

"I thank you, Mr. Clint," observed my tutor, after a little pause, "for putting this matter before us so bluntly and decidedly. For my part, I am far from being a rich man; but, on the other hand, there are no persons who have a better claim upon my resources than my dear young friend and pupil, Marmaduke Heath. That he will repay me, if he survive his uncle, I am more than assured; and if he die early, I shall not regret that the remainder of his young life has been rendered happy through my means, although it may have cost me a few comforts."

I stooped down and said a few words in my tutor's ear. "No, Peter, no," continued he; "you are a good lad, and your father is doubtless generous enough to comply with your wishes; but we must not resort to such a distant source in this emergency, indeed. Mr. Clint, do you think that a hundred and forty to a hundred and sixty pounds a year might be made sufficient to keep Marmaduke with respectability?"

"Half your annual stipend, eh, Mr. Long, eh?" ejaculated the lawyer. "Bless my soul, how this

snuff gets in one's eyes! Such a sum should be quite sufficient; I think that would be found more than enough. He cannot live at your Rectory, of course; that would be almost as bad as at the Hall; but there are plenty of spare rooms in my house in town; he has stayed there before, so that that can be done, we know—Marmaduke and I are old friends.—No, no, it will not hurt me; such a course cannot bring me into greater antagonism with Sir Massingberd than I am in already. I am always at daggers-drawn with him. He is for ever cutting down trees that don't belong to him, or selling heirlooms that are no more his than mine, or embroiling himself with me, the appointed guardian of the property, in some way or other. Yes, I'll take the lad, Mr. Long, come what will of it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed my host energetically; "you honest lawyer, and very worthy man; and you, you good priest—contradictions in terms, both of you—you shall not give away half your annual stipend, or my name is not Harvey Gerard. I have done each of you a very grievous wrong in thought, if not in word, and I hereby beg your pardons. It is possible, I perceive, to be a Tory, and yet preserve, if not a conscience, at least a heart."

My tutor smiled; Mr. Clint bowed his acknowledgments.

"With regard to Mr. Marmaduke Heath, however," pursued our host, "that young gentleman must be my especial charge. From this day until the period when he comes into his property, or lies in need of decent interment, as the case may be, he is my guest; or if

my house is distasteful to him, I will advance him whatever sums he may reasonably require for his maintenance elsewhere. Please to consider that that is settled, gentlemen."

"Whatever we may think of the political opinions of Mr. Harvey Gerard," observed Mr. Clint with feeling, "his name has always been associated with acts of matchless generosity."

"Always, always," echoed Mr. Long; then added reflectively: "he has paid the fines of half the rogues in the country, and bailed the other half who have been committed to prison."

A simultaneous burst of merriment from his three hearers greeted this naïve remark of my unconscious tutor.

"I have done so upon one occasion, I confess," replied Mr. Gerard good-naturedly. "I became surety, in 1791, for the good-behaviour of a poor Birmingham rioter, as I thought, who turned out to be a government spy. However, I assure you, generosity has nothing to do with my present intentions with respect to young Heath. My income is sufficiently large to admit of my accommodating the poor lad with ease, even if the repayment, sooner or later, were not almost certain, as it really is. But, besides all this, I must confess that the undertaking affords me exceeding satisfaction. Mr Long, you are, I have heard, an enthusiastic fisherman: that is no common pleasure which you feel when your rod is bowed by some enormous trout, cunning and strong, who may break the whole of your tackle, and get away after all, but who also may be landed helpless on the bank, a victim to your skill and patience. That is

exactly the sport which I promise myself with Sir Massingberd Heath. If he were one whit less greedy, less formidable, less pitiless, I should feel less hostility towards him; he has fortunately no redeeming point. I have hated Tyranny all my life, and I hate this man, who seems to be the very Embodiment of it. He makes his boast that no one has ever stood between himself and his wicked will. Let us see what he will make of Harvey Gerard."

The speaker drew himself up proudly, but certainly not with unbecoming pride. His form dilated as he spoke, his voice grew deep without losing its distinctness, and into his mild eyes a sternness crept as when the frost congeals the lake. But for a spice of haughtiness, which to some might have appeared even arrogance, he might have stood for St. Michael in his contest with the foul Fiend, and have personified the Spirit of Good defying the Spirit of Evil.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GIPSY CAMP.

AFTER not a little opposition upon the part of Mr. Long, who would have willingly borne his share in Marmaduke's expenses, it was settled that Mr. Gerard should be the young man's host, if he could only be suffered to retain him in defiance of the power of Sir Massingberd; his home, however, was not to be the Dovecot, which was judged to be too much exposed, by its proximity to Fairburn, to the machinations of the enemy. The Gerards were to remove to their town residence, in Harley Street, as soon as their guest was fit to accompany them. At first, his progress was tedious, but he grew rapidly convalescent as soon as he was able to exchange his bed for a sofa. Never was sick man more hospitably treated, more graciously tended. Mr. Gerard possessed that almost feminine gentleness of manner which is generally found in persons of his peculiar organization. His sympathy, at least as easily aroused as his antagonism, was now deeply enlisted in favour of Marmaduke for his own sake; he recognized his talents, and the beauty and tenderness of his mind, and won him from the melancholy that overhung it by pleasant studious talk; while the young man's heart, thrilling responsive to every touch of kindness, turned towards him, and expanded like a flower in

the sun. As for Lucy, what rudest health would I not have exchanged for Marmaduke's languor, as he lay and listened to her clear sweet voice, now singing some cheerful ballad to enliven him, now reading aloud some tale so musically that itself seemed song! He could read to himself but little as yet, and if he did take up a book, his eyes refused to regard it, but followed the lovely girl, wherever she moved, with adoration.

"This happiness is too great to last, Peter," he would often say; "it will all fade one day, I know, and leave me desolate. What man living is worthy to possess yon glorious creature? I feel as though I had no right even to love her. Yet, great Heaven! how I *do* love her! How unconscious she is of her perfect sweetness! How she graces the meanest thing which she may set herself to do! Her presence seems to breathe very life into me; I then forget everything but her—even Sir Massingberd. To return to him would be death, indeed—death, death!" Then he would sink back, as if prostrated with the thought, and so remain despairingly despondent until he heard Lucy's voice, or laugh, or footstep. All this was bitter for me to bear. I was glad when Mr. Long suggested to me that he thought it was no longer necessary for me to remain with Marmaduke, and that I should return to Fairburn Rectory and my studies. Still, my heart was heavy upon that morning which was to be the last I was to spend under the same roof with Lucy Gerard. Within the last few weeks—nay, it had happened in a few hours—I had Loved and I had Lost. If there be any to read this in whose

eyes these words have meaning, they will pity me. I do not match such grief, indeed, for a single instant against the sorrow a man must feel for the loss of the loved companion of his life—against the lone wretchedness of recent widowhood; but it was a grievous blow. I wished Marmaduke and Mr. Gerard “good-bye” without quite knowing that I did so.

“Good-bye, Mr. Meredith,” said Lucy, and though her voice was even lower and sweeter than usual, it wounded me like a knife.

“Why don’t you call him Peter, Lucy?” exclaimed her father, laughing. “I think it would be more civil, now that we are going to lose him.”

“Thank you, sir,” said I gratefully; and thereupon she did say, “God bless you, Peter,” very, very kindly.

Ever since that morning, she called me so; but I was Peter to all of them, you see, as well as to her. Then, too, I called her Lucy, and though for the first and last time, I shall never forget it.

I couldna say mair, but just “Fare ye weel, Lucy!”

Yet that I will mind till the day that I dee.

Then I mounted my horse—my luggage having already preceded me—and slowly took my way towards Fairburn. My lifeblood seemed to ebb with every step. The clang of the gate that shut me out from the last foot of ground belonging to the Dovecot, sent a shudder through me like a knell. I was on the very spot where Marmaduke had met with the accident that had been so nearly fatal. Supposing it had killed him! Supposing—I thanked God that I

was able to thank Him from an honest heart that it had not done so.

Then I felt a little better. Having ascended the hill, I put my horse into a sharp canter upon the common, and the cool air through which I swiftly passed refreshed me. The hollow in which the encampment had been was now deserted, and only the round bare spot amid the green, which is the gipsy autograph, announced that it had ever been there. Some miles farther on, however, a little brown-legged boy, evidently of that wandering fraternity, suddenly emerged from a fir plantation, and stood before me in the road as if to beg. I was already feeling in my pocket for a penny, when, showing his white teeth in gratitude, he shook his head, and coming close to my stirrup, exclaimed: "You are the gentleman from Mr. Gerard's, sir, are you not? Would you please to come and see Granny Rachel?"

In an instant, I remembered the pocket-flask, which I had entirely forgotten since the day in which it came into my possession; for all I knew it was then lying yet in the drawing-room at the Dovecot.

"Yes, my boy, that will I," returned I; "but I fear I have not brought her what she wants."

He looked up in the bright interrogative manner peculiar to his tribe, so different to the stolid wonder of the agriculturist.

"She wants *you*, sir, as I understood. This is the sixth day that she has set me to watch for you by this roadside. Will you please to follow me?"

The boy started off at a pace which compelled me

to move too fast for further questioning; and skirting the plantation for a hundred yards, stopped at the entrance of a roadway leading through the wood. The coming winter had not yet turned the broad green track to mud, and it ran so straight and far, that the pine-trees seemed to stand on either side like a continuous wall, with nothing but the blue heaven for their limit. This landscape of right lines would have delighted a painter of the Pre-Raphaelite school, it looked so stiff and unnatural; but pursuing this track for a little distance, and then plunging over a ditch and bank into the plantation itself, we suddenly came upon a scene which would have suited Morland's pencil. A low tent, with half-naked but merry children crawling in and out; a she-ass and her foal; a handsome male Epicurean, lying on his back, smoking a short, well-coloured pipe, the hue of which precisely resembled that of his own skin; a young girl in scarlet mantle, and with earrings of great splendour, gathering fir-cones to feed the flames which licked around an iron pot suspended on four sticks, piled musket-fashion; and an old crone, sitting by the same, and picking the feathers from a bird, which, had the time of year been beyond the end of September, I should have certainly taken for a hen-pheasant. But to suppose this, would have been to suppose an infraction of the Game Laws! The walnut-stained children stopped their play as I approached, and stood in various attitudes of wonder, like beauteous bronzes; the man turned over on his side, and opened his slumbrous eyes a hair's-breadth; the girl flashed one quick comprehensive glance upon me, and then resumed her occupation. The old

woman nodded familiarly without rising, and observed quietly: "So you are come at last, Peter Meredith. I trust you have brought good news of Marmaduke Heath."

"He is better," said I, "much better; and he knows who brought him help, and is very grateful. You have been expected daily at the Dovecot, where something more substantial than mere thanks is waiting for you."

"Rachel Liversedge desires neither silver nor gold," returned the old woman; "she has had her reward already, if what you say be true. It was not for love of the boy that I acted as I did; he has too much evil blood in him to earn my liking. But I am glad as though he were my own son that he will live."

"Carew," cried she triumphantly, "no wonder *bura* Sir Massingberd looked *kalo* as ourselves."

"Oh, the great man looks black does he?" said I.

The old woman dropped the bird, the girl her fir-cones, and both stared wildly at me, as though my voice had come from the clouds; the man sprang to his feet, and uttered a cry of wonder.

"What! do you speak our tongue?" cried he.

"Nay; you speak mine," returned I, calmly. "*Bura* is great; and *kala*, which you call *kalo*, is black, of course; everybody knows that who knows Hindustanee."

Then the three burst out together in a language, one word out of four of which seemed to be more or less familiar to me; as for understanding what they said, of course it was simply impossible; but no

matter, I had established my reputation. From that moment I felt myself to be the honoured guest of the family. Would I smoke? Would I eat? Would I drink? I was thirsty, and I said that I would gladly take some water—which, at a venture, I called *pannee*.

“*Pannee!*” cried they, extravagantly delighted. “He talks like a true Cingari; and only look! is he not dark-skinned!”

The few words that my old ayah had taught me in India had thus procured me a hearty welcome in a Midshire fir-plantation.

“Sit down by me, Peter Meredith, my son,” exclaimed the old woman; “and do you fetch him water, Mina.”

I dismounted, and did as I was bid; while the young girl took a pitcher, and presently brought it filled from a running stream near by, and offered it to me, like another Rebecca. But her grandmother—for such she was—cried, “Stop! let me put something in it;” and produced from her pocket the self-same flask which she herself had given me a few weeks ago, and which I had thought was left behind at the Dovecot.

“Why, I was blaming myself for not having brought you that thing back to-day,” said I; “I never heard of your coming to claim it.”

“Nor did I, young gentleman,” returned the old woman proudly. “Harvey Gerard is too kind a man to visit when one is not in need. That was why I left his house that day, directly I had told what had befallen Marmaduke Heath: I did not wish him to think I waited for my reward. He returned me this with his own hands. He is not one of your

proud ones. When we had the fever here—Mina, darling, you remember who came to see you, and saved your life?”

“Ah, yes!” cried the girl, clasping her dark hands, which gleamed with tawdry rings; “and his daughter, too, how I love her!”

There was a little pause; I felt my ears tingle, my cheeks burn. I did not dare look up from the ground.

“Lucy Gerard is very fair,” whispered the old woman; “she will make a good and loving wife;” then she added roguishly, and in that gipsy tone which smacks so much of the race-course: “Shall I tell your fortune, my pretty gentleman?”

“No, I thank you,” said I, hastily; “I have no great confidence in your information as to the future. With respect to the past, on the other hand, you can doubtless satisfy me, if you will. I have a great curiosity to know how you became possessed of yonder flask with the Heath griffin.”

“Peter Meredith,” returned the old woman, very gravely, “you have asked me to tell you a sad story, and one to relate which will cost me much. It is not our custom, however, to refuse the first request of a new friend. But before I begin, let me ask you a question in my turn. Has it never struck you why Sir Massingberd Heath has not long ago taken to himself a young wife, and begotten an heir for the bonny lands of Fairburn, in despite of his nephew?”

Until that moment, the idea had never crossed my brain; but no sooner was it thus mooted than I wondered greatly at the shortsightedness of those

among whom Marmaduke's affairs had been so lately discussed, and in particular at that of Mr. Clint, who, as a lawyer, should surely have at once foreseen such a contingency. "Well," said, "I confess that, for my part, I have never thought of it; but there cannot be much danger of Sir Massingberd's becoming a wooer now; why, what young woman would be won to such as he?"

"What young woman would *not* be won?" replied Rachel Liversedge, grimly. "Think you that his white head and stony heart would weigh too heavy in the balance against his title and the reversion of his lands? Remember, all that is around us, and all that we could see from yonder hill to the right hand and to the left—pasture and corn-field, farm and park—would fall to the offspring of her who would venture, for a few years, to be Lady Heath. Peter, there is one maiden in Midshire, known to you and me, who would not consent to do this thing, though the offer was thrice as splendid; but I doubt if there be more than one."

"If that be so," said I, "why does not Sir Massingberd marry?"

"The answer to that is the story I am about to tell you," returned Rachel.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHY SIR MASSINGBERD DID NOT MARRY.

"I SUPPOSE you have heard, Peter Meredith, young as you are," began the old woman, "a great deal of ill-speaking against us Wanderers. We not only kill game, but even domestic poultry, if the opportunity is given to us; we not only steal wood, but horse-flesh; and since we are so partial to carrion, it is not to be wondered at that we sometimes suffocate a sheep with a piece of his own wool, in order to get the carcass cheap from the farmer. Yet whatever false charges are current about us now, these are nothing, either in gravity or number, to what they were when I was a young girl—that is, fifty years ago. Every man's hand, every woman's tongue, was against us: magistrates committed us without testimony; rogues made a trade of accusing us solely to get blood-money. Our name was more than a by-word, it was a brand; to call a man a gipsy, was to say vagabond and thief in one. Under these circumstances, Massingberd Heath left his father's house yonder, and came to live with us as congenial company. We were in this very wood the day he did so. The sun shone as brightly as now, the streamlet ran just as blithe, the air was filled, as now, with the sweet-smelling pine. The people only are changed—ah

me, how changed!—who made up that scene. There was my father; he died! ten years younger than I am now; is not that strange, boy? his brother Morris dead; poor Stanley Carew, you shall hear of him presently; a handsomer lad by far than his nephew there; my beautiful Sinnamenta, compared to little Mina yonder, though she is pretty enough, like a blush-rose to a mere peony, the flower of womankind. If there are ladies and women born into the world, then she was a lady. There are no such beauties now; no, friend, not even at the Dovecot. Let me see; I have counted four: then I was there also, comely enough, 'twas said, but not to be spoken of for looks with my younger sister.

“We were occupied pretty much as you see us now, for life in the Greenwood possesses but little variety, when Massingberd Heath strode in among us, with his gun upon his shoulder. We knew him well, but were not inclined to dislike him. He was

dissipated, wild young fellow, but, as yet, his heart was thought, as the saying is, to be in the right place; his popularity, however, was principally owing to his antagonism to his father. Sr Wentworth had long passed through the spendthrift stage, and was very close with respect to money-matters; a harsh and griping landlord, and it is probable enough a niggard parent. His son's extravagances were at that time insignificant compared to what they afterwards became, yet the old man was for ever complaining. He persecuted all who were poor and in his power, but the gipsies especially. He feared for his deer, for his game, for his fences, and, besides, I verily believe he detested us for our im-

providence. I remember he sent two of my young brothers to prison for tossing for halfpence upon a Sunday—he who made not even a pretence of religion himself, and had been used invariably to pass his day of rest in town at Tattersall's, betting his thousands on some approaching race. It is said that this wretched old man used to horsewhip young Massingberd almost daily, until a certain occasion, when the latter found himself stronger than he imagined, and reversed the process. After that, Sir Wentworth confined himself to cursing his offspring whenever they quarrelled. It was after some dreadful outbreak of passion on the part of the old man that Massingberd Heath left house and home, and elected to join our wandering fortunes. We were very unwilling that this should be. It was by no means so unusual a proceeding then as now, for persons of good birth, but broken fortunes, to become gipsies, but such had usually their private reasons for remaining so for life. They were very rarely criminals, but generally social outlaws, for whom there could be no reconciliation at home, or younger sons of respectable families, with quite a mountain of debt upon their shoulders. These were regularly rationalized among us; and if they conducted themselves for sufficient time in accordance with our regulations, they were permitted to intermarry with us.

“Now it was certain that Massingberd Heath sought only a temporary home; as soon as his father died, or even offered terms to him, he would leave us, and resume his proper station. Moreover, how was the maintenance of discipline and obedience to the chief of our tribe, absolutely essential as it is, to be

kept up in the case of this new-comer? Even at that time, he was a headstrong, wilful man, to whom all authority, however lawful or natural, was hateful. Was it to be expected that he who defied his own father, himself a man of iron will, would obey Morris Liversedge? On the other hand, Uncle Morris rather liked the young fellow. He had connived at many a raid on his father's own preserves—to such a pitch had the quarrel grown between them—and kept our pot boiling with bird and beast. Many and many a time had he led the Fairburn keepers to one extremity of the preserves, while the slaughter was going on in the other. Moreover, it would be of great importance, could we make a friend of the man who would one day own all these pleasant haunts of ours, and who could say a good word, and a strong one, for the poor persecuted gipsies, when it was needed. Poor Morris did not know that the rebel but too often turns out a tyrant, when he gets his chance. He could not foresee Sir Massingberd Heath sending folks to prison, or getting them kidnapped, and sent across the seas, for snaring the hares that he held so cheaply when they did not happen to belong to himself. If you want to find a gentleman who in his youth, and landless, has been a poacher whenever the opportunity offered, look you among the game-preservers on the bench of justices. This, however, is among the least of the basenesses of him of whom I speak. It is not for his bitter guardianship of bird and beast, or his hateful oppression of his fellow creatures, that my heart cries out for judgment against this man, that I look with eager longing for that hour when God shall take him into His own hand.”

The old woman paused a moment with closed eyes, and muttered something that was inaudible to me, resting herself at the same time to and fro.

“Massingberd Heath became one of us, Peter Meredith, as far as it is possible for such a wretch to be so; he ate with us, and drank with us, which they say is a sacred bond among even savages. It was not so with him. He cast his evil eyes upon Sinnamenta, to love her after the fashion of his accursed race. Perhaps you may think, Peter Meredith, that such an occurrence should have been foreseen by her father or her Uncle Morris, and, for my part, I always thought that it was the presence of my lovely sister which mainly caused this man to join our company; but, at all events, neither they nor I dreaded any ill consequences. A gipsy girl is not a light-of-love maiden, like those of fairer skins. Heaven, who gives her beauty, gives her virtue also: this is not denied, even by our enemies. When you call your sweetheart ‘Gipsy,’ it is in love, not in reproach. Massingberd Heath knew this well, and therefore it was he took such pains in the matter. It is true that we do not marry in church, but when we wed among ourselves, the marriage is not less sacred. It was a wedding of this sort, indissoluble by one party, but not by the other, which this man wished to compass. He did not gain his end.”

The old woman’s eyes sparkled with triumph for a moment as she said these words, but her voice sank low as she continued:—

“Peter Meredith, if you have a sister, think of her while I speak of mine; she cannot be more pure than little Sinnamenta, nor less designing. Her weakness

was one common to all women, but especially to those of our unhappy race; she was fond of finery—fine clothing, jewels, shawls; they became her; she looked like any princess when attired in them. Stanley Carew, who loved her in all honesty, could give her no such costly gifts as Massingberd Heath showered upon her, and, to help his end, even upon me. The gipsy's ragged coat looked mean and poor beside that of our guest. This man, too, whom you know but as a scowling tyrant, with a face scarred with passion and excesses, was then a handsome youth. You smile, Peter, at the wonder of it; it is, however, not less true than that the wrinkled hag to whom you are now listening was then a bonny girl. Imagine *that*, Peter, and you can imagine anything. Ah, Time, Time, surely at the end of you, there will be something to recompense us for all that you have taken away!"

Once more Rachel Liversedge paused as if in pain; then with eyes whose sight seemed to receive but little of what was present, but were fixed on the unreturning Past, continued as follows:—

"Yes, Massingberd Heath was handsome enough, unless when enraged; his wrath always brought the horse-hoe out upon his forehead.¹ Ay, and he was agreeable enough, too. He could smile as though he

¹ I am reminded by a friendly critic of the "suspicious coincidence" of a horse-shoe on the forehead, in the case of "Red-gauntlet." I never think of Sir Massingberd without thinking of that worthy; and it has been a matter of doubt with me, whether Sir Walter Scott might not himself have seen the Squire of Fairburn and drawn him from the life, both as to mind and feature, in his famous novel.

had a heart, and vow as though he owned a god. By his devilish art he managed to ingratiate himself with Sinnamenta; he caused her to treat poor Stanley ill, and then, pretending to take his part, got credit for generosity. There are many who call us gipsies a base people, yet this excess of meanness was quite new to us; my little sister—that was what I always called her, because I loved her so—she believed him. She would have trusted to his word, and married him according to our rites, and been his wife and drudge for all her life; but since this could not be without the consent both of her father and Morris, he had to ask it of them. He might as well have asked it of Sir Wentworth. They had got to know him well by close companionship, for men fathom men better than women do—even gipsy women, who foretell men's fortunes for them—and they answered, 'No.' They did not believe that he had the least intention of being with us longer than it suited him, and they peremptorily refused his request. After one burst of passionate threats, the young man pretended to yield assent to their decision. Morris was inclined to think this acquiescence genuine; but my father, more warmly interested in the matter, and therefore perhaps less credulous, kept on his guard. Finding out that Massingberd Heath had secretly made overtures of reconciliation to his father, and missing him one night from the camp, he caused Morris to strike tent at once; and before morning, we had put twenty miles between us and Fairburn. Nor was this effected too soon, for, as we heard long afterwards, the constables were searching this very wood for us at daybreak.

“Our company was bound on a long travel to Kirk-Yetholm, Roxburghshire, one of the few places in Scotland, although but one mile from the frontier of Northumberland, where the gipsies reside in any number. There we should meet with friends, and be safe from all molestation. It was late in the year to travel so far and into such a climate, but there was no help for it; and moreover, some of the Carews had a house there, to which Stanley said we should be welcome, and so it turned out. I believe Sinnamonta would rather that we had camped out of doors, even in that northern clime, so disinclined was she to be beholden to him or his friends, after what had happened, although she did not dare to say so. Poor Stanley imagined that now we had removed from the neighbourhood of his rival, he might renew his suit with success, but the proud girl would not listen to him. She did not exactly pine after the man whose wiles she had so narrowly escaped, but her life seemed henceforth saddened. The domestic duties which had hitherto sat so lightly upon her became burdensome, and she set about them languidly. The whole of the time we remained at Kirk-Yetholm, and it was many, many months, she never mentioned Massingberd Heath, but never ceased to think of him. It was fated that she was to be undeceived about that man too late.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE REASON CONTINUED.

“ABOUT a year after our departure from Fairburn, Sinnamenta and I had been to sell some baskets, the making of which was a great trade with us at that time, at Wooler, in Northumberland; and on our return from the fair that was being held there, we met a number of gentlemen driving home from shooting in the Cheviots. They went by very rapidly, yet not so fast but that I recognized one of their number; I had only to look at my little sister's cheeks, to see that she had recognized him also. The very next day came Massingberd Heath to our camp, professing himself injured by our abrupt withdrawal from his society, volunteering his companionship as before, and reiterating his vows and promises to Sinnamenta. She expressed herself in such a manner, as to lead us almost to fear she might be induced to elope with him; while he, upon his side, seemed prepared to sacrifice everything to obtain her. His very selfishness caused him, as it were, to forget himself; and I do believe, if it had been insisted upon, he would have had the banns published in Wooler Church, in the hearing of the fine friends with whom he was staying, and been married by the parson. However, he again proposed to go through the Cingari ceremony, and this time *Morris and my father agreed to it.*

Having acknowledged himself to be an adopted gipsy, Massingberd Heath was joined in wedlock to Sinnamenta Liversedge. The ordinary ceremonies were dispensed with by command of Morris, the bride and bridegroom only pledging themselves to one another solemnly in the presence of the assembled tribe. It was then, since he could not purchase suitable presents in such an out-of-the-way district, that I received from that man's hand this shooting-flask, as a remembrance of that day. My uncle commanded me to accept it (although I vehemently disapproved of what had been done), and I therefore keep it now, when every other gift of that accursed man has long been committed to the flames. For my part, I could not understand this novel pliance on the part of Morris and my father; while Sinnamenta, as I think, implicitly believed in her lover's protestation, that for her sake he would all his life be a wanderer like ourselves. That very day, however, he took her away southward, on his road to London.

“For beauty, as I have said, and for gentleness, there never breathed the equal of my little sister, and yet in six short months this Heath grew weary of her; like a spoiled child tired with a fragile toy, he cared not what became of her, so long as it vexed his eyes no more. It is not necessary to tell what brutal insult he put upon her; enough to say that she fled from him in terror, as he had intended her to do, and returned to us, heart-stricken, woe-begone, about to become a mother, with nothing but wretchedness in the Future, and even her happy Past a dream dispelled. It was dreadful to look upon my little sister.

and compare her to what she had been so short a time before. She felt the cold after her luxurious life in town; but she was far more ill at ease in mind than body. Above all, she sorrowed because her lover's desertion had left her disgraced—that she had brought shame upon all who belonged to her. Incited by the poor girl's misery, Morris and my father put into effect an audacious design which they had privately had long in hand. We were back again at Fairburn—all but Stanley Carew, who was away about a new horse for our covered cart—not camping in the plantation, as of old, for fear of Sir Wentworth, but upon the common hard by. On a certain morning, neither my father nor uncle went forth as usual, but sat at home smoking and watching at the opening of the tent. Not long after breakfast, there appeared a wayfarer in the distance, whose form showed gigantic in the summer haze.

“‘That must be a big fellow, little sister,’ said I, drawing her attention to it. She was sitting huddled up, as usual, in front of the fire; but no sooner had she caught sight of the object in question, than she ran with a cry to her father's knee, and besought him to save her from Massingberd Heath. Ah, even then, at that last moment, if father or uncle had but consulted me, or let me into their plans, I should not have my little sister's shuddering face before me as now, the large eyes wild, the full lips pale with terror. He had beaten her, poor darling, even before the scene that was coming; but she had even more reason than she knew for fear. This man came striding on to the entrance of the tent, and stood there looking at its inmates with a withering

scowl. 'Why don't you speak,' said he, 'you vagabonds! For what is it that you have dared to send for me?'

"My father pointed towards Sinnamenta—'Is not that cause enough, Massingberd Heath?'

"'No,' retorted the ruffian, coolly. 'What is she to me? The drab has come to her thieving friends again, it seems—the more fool she; for there was more than one who had a fancy for her in town, and would have taken her off my hands.'

"My father's fingers mechanically sought the knife which lay beside his half-finished basket; but my uncle Morris stood up between him and the speaker, and thus replied:—

"Massingberd Heath, I sent for you to tell you something which concerns both us and you. Many months ago, you came to us, uninvited and unwelcome, and elected to be a gipsy like ourselves. This makes you smile very scornfully; yet, if you did not mean the thing you said, you lied. However, we believed you. You were admitted into what, however wretched and debased it may seem to you, was our home, and all we had to offer you was at your service. You fell in love with that poor girl yonder, and she did not tremble at your voice, as now, but trusted to your honour. It is true, your position in the world was high, and hers was what you saw it to be. Still you wooed her, and not she you; that is so, and you know it. Do not slander her, sir, lest presently you should be sorry for it. Again and again, then, you demanded her hand in marriage—such marriage, that is, as prevails among our people—not so ceremonious, indeed, as with the rest of the

world, but not less binding. This we would not grant, because we disbelieved your protestations on your honour and before your God; and disbelieved them, as it has turned out, with reason. Then we fled from you and your false solicitations to the north, hundreds of miles away; even thither you followed us, or else accidentally fell in with us; I know not which. You renewed your offers and your oaths. We found, all worthless as you are, that the poor girl loved you still, and, yielding to your repeated importunity, we suffered her to become your wife.'

"'Wife!' repeated the renegade, contemptuously. 'Do you suppose, then, that I valued your gipsy mummeries at a pin's head? You might as well attempt to tie these wrists of mine with the gossamer from yonder furze.'

"'We knew that, Massingberd Heath, although the girl did not know it; she trusted you, although your every word was false.'

"'She is fool enough for anything,' returned the other, brutally. 'But I know all this. Have you dared to bring me here merely to repeat so stale a story?'

"'A story with an ending that you have yet to learn,' pursued my uncle, sternly. 'You were wedded by no gipsy mummeries, as you call them; you took Sinnamenta Liversedge, in the presence of many persons, solemnly to wife.'

"'Ay, and I might take her sister there, and marry her to-day after the same fashion, and no law could say me "nay."'

"'Yes, *here*, Massingberd Heath; but not at Kirk-Yetholm.'

“‘And why not?’ inquired the ruffian, with a mocking laugh, that had, however, something shrill and wavering in it.

“‘Because Kirk-Yetholm is over the Border, and, by the laws of Scotland, my niece Sinnamenta is your wife, proud man, and nothing but death can dis sever the bond!’

“An awful silence succeeded my uncle’s words. Massingberd Heath turned livid, and twice in vain essayed to speak; he was well nigh strangled by passion.

“‘I thank heaven, Rachel,’ murmured my little sister, ‘that I am not that shame to thee and to my race which I thought myself to be.’

“‘You shall have but little to thank heaven for, girl, if this be true,’ cried her husband, hoarse with concentrated rage; ‘somebody shall pay for this.’

“‘It is true,’ quoth my father, ‘and you feel it to be so. Nothing remains, then, but to make the best of it. We do not seek anything at your hands, nor——’

“‘Only the right of camping undisturbed about Fairburn,’ interposed my uncle Morris, who was of a grasping disposition, and had planned the whole matter, I fear, not without an eye to the advantage of his tribe. ‘You wouldn’t treat your wife’s family as trespassers.’

“‘Certainly not,’ returned Massingberd Heath, with bitterness; ‘they shall be most welcome. I should be extremely sorry if they were to leave my neighbourhood just yet. In the meantime, however, I want my wife—my Wife. Come along with me, my pretty one.’

"He looked like a wild beast, within springing distance of his prey.

"‘Oh, father, uncle, defend me!’ cried the miserable girl. ‘What have you done to bring this man’s vengeance upon me?’

"‘Ay, you are right there!’ answered her husband, in a voice that froze my veins. ‘That is still left for me—vengeance. Come along, I say; I hunger until it shall begin.’

"‘Massingberd Heath,’ cried I, throwing myself at his feet, ‘for God’s sake have mercy upon her; it is not her fault. She knew no more than you of all these things. Look how ill and pale she is—you above all men should have pity on her wretched condition. Oh leave her with us, leave my little sister here, and neither she nor we will ever trouble you, ever come near you. It shall be just the same as though you had never set eyes upon us: it shall indeed! Oh, you would not, *could* not surely be cruel to such a one as she.’

"I pointed to her as she stood clinging to her father’s arm as much for support as in appeal, so beautiful, so pitiful, so weak; a spectacle to move a heart of stone.

"‘Could I not be cruel,’ returned he, with a grating laugh, ‘ay, to even such a one as she? Ask *her*—ask *her*.’

"There was no occasion to put the question; you saw the answer in her shrinking form, her trembling limbs; his every word fell upon her like a blow.

"‘She has not yet known, however, what I can be to my *Wife*’ continued he. ‘Come, my pretty one, come.’

“‘She shall not,’ cried my father, vehemently; ‘it shall never be in his power to hurt her.’

“‘What! and I her husband?’ exclaimed the other, mockingly. ‘Both one until death us do part! Not come?’

“‘He will kill her,’ murmured my father; ‘her blood will be on my head.’

“‘Are you coming, wife?’ cried Massingberd Heath, in a terrible voice; he stepped forward, and grasped her slender wrist with fingers of steel. Morris and my father rushed forward, but the man had swung her behind him, placing himself between her and them, and at the same instant he had taken from his pocket a life-preserver—he carries it to this day—armed with which he was a match for five such men. ‘And now,’ cried he, ‘what man shall stop me from doing what I will with my own?’

“‘I!’ exclaimed a sudden voice, and with the word some dark mass launched itself so violently against the throat of Massingberd Heath that the giant toppled and fell; upon his huge breast, knife in hand, knelt Stanley Carew, his eyes gleaming with hate, his lithe body working like a panther’s. He was not hesitating, not he, he was only drinking in a delicious draught of revenge, before he struck.

“‘Strike!’ cried I, ‘strike hard and quick, Carew!’ But while the blade was in air, Morris and my father plucked him backwards, and suffered his intended victim to rise, although despoiled of his weapon.

“‘No, Carew; that will never do,’ quoth Morris. ‘We should have the whole country upon us in an hour, and they would hang us all together.’

“‘Carew is that man’s name, is it?’ exclaimed Massingberd Heath. ‘I will not forget it, be sure. You shall all pay for this, trust me; but he, and *this one*, more than all. Come away, wife, come away.’

“‘Yes, she must go, Carew,’ interposed my uncle, checking a furious movement of the young man’s. ‘He knows all now, and has a right to what he demands.’

“‘Ay, but if he lays one finger upon her,’ cried the passionate gipsy, ‘if he dares to harm her even by a word, and I hear of it, as sure as I see the sun this day, I will know what is the colour of his life-blood. You may take her away across the seas, but I will follow you; you may surround yourself with precautions, but I will come at you; you may go day and night in mail, but this knife shall find your heart out.’

“Massingberd Heath nodded contemptuously, without speaking; and striding from the tent, signed to Sinnamenta to follow him, which she did, moaning and weeping, and casting backward, ever and anon, pitiful glances upon the home and friends she had exchanged for such an evil lot. I never saw my little sister more.”

As if the remembrance of this sad scene had utterly overcome her, Rachel Liversedge hid her face in her hands, and wept until the tears welled through her tanned and shrivelled fingers.

“I am indeed distressed,” said I, “to have caused you so much pain. I will not make you sad by telling me more.”

“Nay, my boy, since I have begun it, let me finish with it; I shall think of it all the same, and it is better

to speak than think. That very night Stanley Carew was arrested upon the charge of stealing the horse which he had bought in open market, and ridden home just in time to play the part I have described. In the days I speak of, forty pound was given as a reward to those who gave such evidence as produced a capital conviction, and many a gipsy perished innocently in consequence of that wicked ordinance. It is possible that this accusation was made by one of those who made a practice of earning blood-money; but I am positive y certain the false witness was set on by Ma-singberd Heath, even if that man did not originate the charge. It was pressed against poor Carew very harshly; and although the farmer of whom he bought the animal came honestly forward, and swore to its being the same which he had sold the prisoner, his evidence was rejected on account of some slight mistake in the description. You must have heard tell of that awful execution long ago at Crittenden jail, when the wretched victim to perjury and revenge uttered these terrible words: 'O God, if thou dost not deliver me, I will not believe there is a God.' That unhappy man was Stanley Carew. My father and uncle were pitilessly persecuted and imprisoned, and died before their time. These wrists have worn fetters, this back has suffered stripes; nor did the vengeance of our enemy cease even with one generation. One of my boys is beyond seas, and another within stone walls; yet I know that the hate of Sir Massingberd Heath is not yet slaked."

"But what became of your little sister, poor Sinnamenta?"

"I know not what she suffered immediately after

she was taken from us; Heaven only knows: her husband carried her a great way off out of our ken. But this I have heard, that when he told her of the death of Stanley Carew she fell down like one dead, and presently being delivered of a son, the infant died after a few hours; the mother lived—a maniac. Yes. Massingberd Heath, you did not kill my little sister, after all; yonder she lives, but recks not whether you are kind or cruel; she drinks no more the bitter cup of love's betrayal."

"She is surely not at Fairburn," asked I, "is she?"

"What else should keep us here, boy, to be harried by keepers, to be vexed by constables and justices? What else should keep me here in a place that tortures me with memories of my youth, and of loving faces that have crumbled into dust? What else but the hope of one day seeing my little sister yet, and the vengeance of Heaven upon him who has worked her ruin!" The old woman rose up as she spoke, and looked menacingly towards Fairburn Hall. "I could almost exclaim with poor Carew," cried she, "that if Massingberd Heath escape some awful end, there is no Avenger on high. I am old, but I shall see it, yes, I shall see it before I die."

If there had been more to tell, which fortunately there was not, I do not think Rachel Liversedge could have spoken further; her emotion, far more than her exertions, had reduced her strength so far, that though she uttered the last words energetically enough, I had had for some time a difficulty in hearing what she said.

"I thank you for listening to the tediousness of an ancient dame so long," murmured she: "if you were not a good boy, and half a gipsy, you would never have been so patient. I have told you all this to put you on your guard: it is no secret, but still you may not have heard it. Distrust, despise, detest Massingberd Heath; and warn his nephew, if you be his friend, not to venture again within his uncle's reach."

"I will, I will," cried I; "and I thank you in his name." I held out my hand, and she turned it over in her own.

"An honest palm," quoth she, "without a stain. There is one unlucky cross about it, Peter, that is all. You must not fret for that."

I mounted my horse amid cordial "good-byes" from the gipsies, who had been pursuing their usual avocations during the above recital, as though nothing was more common than that the head of the family should have a secret of two hours long to communicate to a strange young gentleman; and throwing a shilling to the boy who had shown me the way, I took my leave.

It was not till I left the plantation far behind me, and had ridden at speed for some distance on the open road, that I was able to shake off the sombre feelings that oppressed me, and to meet Mrs. Myrtle's welcome to the Rectory with an answering smile.

CHAPTER XVI.

I DO SIR MASSINGBERD A LITTLE FAVOUR.

UPON my return to Fairburn, I became the object of immense curiosity and attraction. I was stared at in the rector's pew at church, and, in my solitary rides, whithersoever I went, as the repository of the great secret of the disruption between Sir Massingberd and his nephew. It was even whispered that I was the prime mover of the young man's rebellion, and had planned the very manner of his escape upon Panther, including the accident. At all events, I knew all that had happened, which nobody else knew, except my tutor himself. Now Mr. Long was as close as wax. Many an invitation had Mrs. Myrtle obtained of late to take a dish of tea upon grounds which her hosts had since stigmatized as false pretences. As the housekeeper and confidential servant of the rector, she had been asked by Mrs. Arabel of the Grange Farm to take evening refreshment with her in a friendly way; also by Mrs. Remnants, who kept that extensive emporium in the village which supplied snuff to the aged of both sexes (though not gratuitously), becoming cambrics to the young, and lollipops to those who had not yet reached that period of life wherein outward adornment is preferred to inward gratification; also by the exciseman's wife; nay, there was not anybody's

wife in Fairburn, having the wherewithal to make a tea-table alluring, and being in a sufficiently high position in life to venture upon the step, who did not invite Mrs. Myrtle to visit her, and proceed to treat her like a refractory pump; they poured a little down, in hopes to be more than remunerated for the outlay. But alas! a'though the dear good lady was willing enough, being indeed a gossip born, she had nothing to tell them. She was not equal to the task of invention, and of facts, even to trade upon in tea and toast, she had absolutely none.

Conceive, then, how every face was turned interrogatively towards Master Meredith—no, *Mr.* Meredith, now that the object of everybody was to please him. How the dames dropped courtesies, and hoped my honour was well; and my honour's friend too, Mr. Marmaduke, he was well too, they trusted—Heaven bless him; and he was staying away from Fairburn a good bit, was he not? and how did his uncle like that, who had always kept him at home so strict?—and was it true that he was residing with Mr. Harvey Gerard? well, dear me, and how odd that was; an atheist and a democrat, people did say; but there, there were some again as spoke well of him.

Sedate Mr. Arabel, set on, without doubt, by his inquisitive lady, even waylaid me in a narrow lane and insisted upon my looking in at the farm, and partaking of casual hospitality. “Ye'll just have three drars and a spet,” said he (meaning by that form of expression a few whiffs of a pipe), “and take a glass of ale;” and when I declined the first offer upon the ground of not being a smoker, and the

second on the plea that it was only eleven o'clock A.M., and consequently rather early for ale, he confessed that his missus was a-waiting for me with a bottle of cowslip wine, and a seed-cake of her own making. It was rather difficult to escape from hospitable snares of this kind, but I revealed as little as possible without giving absolute offence. On the other hand, I received some information, the details of which had not been confided to me by Mr. Long.

"Well, sir," remarked Mrs. Arabel, after I had told her all I meant to tell, which was not much, "and it's no wonder as Mr. Marmaduke *should* have run away, I'm sure."

"My good lady," observed I, "pray be particular; I never said he ran away; I said his horse ran away."

"Yes, of course, sir," responded the mistress of the Grange, winking in a manner that made me quite uncomfortable; "you are very right to say that, Mr. Meredith, very right. But Sir Massingberd's opinion is, that it was all planned from first to last, only he says you nearly overdid it."

"Ah, indeed," said I, "how was that?"

"Well, it seems Sir Massingberd was quite deceived about that horse he bought for his nephew; instead of being quiet, and fit for the lad, it was a perfect demon; and it was sheer madness of you young gentlemen to go racing in order to make it run away; then to arrange with Mr. Gerard all beforehand; well, I must say, I shouldn't have thought that either of you would have had the depth."

"Thank you, Mrs. Arabel," said I, laughing;

"I am sorry you entertain so low an idea of our intelligence."

"Well, sir," returned the farmer's wife, with an air of excessive candour, my husband, you see, he often has said to me, says he, 'That young squire Marmaduke, I'm darned if he ain't little better than a fool; he don't know what shot to use for rabbits, that he don't; I never saw his equal for ignorance. And as for that lad from the Ingies—that was you, you know, sir—well, of all the young fellows turned of seventeen as I ever saw, he's the'——"

Here Mrs. Arabel crimsoned, and stopped short, as if she had been very nearly betrayed into saying something which was not entirely complimentary.

"Pray, go on, my dear madam," said I; "'of all the young fellows turned of seventeen whom he had ever seen, I was the'——"

"Well, sir, he'd just the same opinion of you as he had of Master Marmaduke; but, for my part, I always said, that although you might neither on you know so much as you ought to, and though you might seem, as it were——"

"Ay, you always stood our friend, and said we were not such fools as we looked; did you?"

"Just so," replied Mrs. Arabel, simply; "and so you see it has turned out. If Mr. Marmaduke can only live elsewhere till something happens to Sir Massingberd—although, indeed, he looks as if nothing ever could hurt him—his life will doubtless be much pleasanter than at the Hall; it is no place for a young gentleman like him, *surely*, although, indeed, things are better there than they were. The dark-eyed foreigneering-looking young person, although,

indeed, she was old enough to know better ; well, *she's* gone."

"So I have heard," said I, drily.

"Yes, she went away in a whirlwind, *she* did," continued Mrs. Arabel, reflectively.

"Dear me," replied I, "I never heard that."

"Ah, indeed, I daresay not ; why, you see, Mr. Long was a little mixed up in it. Perhaps he thought it better not to tell you. Take another glass of cowslip wine, sir ; it has been more than ten years in bottle ; and the cake is as good a cake as you will put teeth into in all Midshire, though I say it as shouldn't say it. Well, the thing happened in this way, you see. The foreigneering female, she used to throw things at folks ; dishes, plates, whatever came first to hand, whenever she was in her tantrums. Mr. Gilmore he had his head opened with a slop-basin, so that you could lay your finger in it ; and Oliver Bradford, I believe she fired a gun at him, charged with swan shot. However, at times, she was quite otherwise, crying and submissive as a child. They said it was Religion up at the Hall ; but they knows nothing about that ; how should they ? It was hysterics, I daresay, and serve her right too. Well, who should come here, the very Sunday after Mr. Marmaduke had run away, and when Sir Massingberd was like a wild man with rage, and couldn't speak without blaspheming, but one of them Methodee preachers as sometimes hold forth upon our common. Now the foreigneering female was a-walking in the park shrubbery, with one of her hysterical fits upon her, I suppose, and what does she hear through the palings but words

as I suppose the poor creature never listened to before ; and presently out she comes upon the common, and stands up among all the people, with her great eyes swollen with weeping, and her painted cheeks—and I always said they were painted—daubed and smeared with tears. Carter John, who is very much given to that sort of worship, he was there ; and he told me she looked for all the world like the woman in the great picture over the communion-table in Crittenden Church, who is wiping the feet of our Lord with her hair.

“Then the preacher, he bade her repent while there was yet time, and fear nothing but only God. But Sir Massingberd, he came out, and dragged her in from the very preacher’s hand, and presently back again he comes with a horse-whip, and swears there shall be no Methodees in his parish, and if he caught the hypocritical ranter—as he called him—within hearing again, he’d split his ears. Now, I don’t go with him there,” pursued Mrs. Arabel, gravely. “It isn’t for us, Mr. Meredith, to say as nobody can’t pick up good, unless it’s in church ; and least of all should such things be said by Sir Massingberd, who lets that beautiful family pew get damp and mouldy, with the fireplace always empty all the winter long, and never puts his nose into it from year’s end to year’s end. However, what does the foreignneering female do, but declare she would starve herself to death, before she would eat the bread of unrighteousness any longer ; and not one morsel of food would she take, though they locked her up, and tried to tempt her with her most favourite dishes. So Sir Massingberd, being at his wits’ end, came over to the

parson, and begged him to come and persuade the woman to be reasonable, and take some refreshment ; and Mr. Long—he at first declined to interfere in such a matter at all, but presently thinking the poor creature might be really penitent, although it came about through a Methodee, and hoping to do her some good, although not in the way Sir Massingberd intended, he accompanied him to the Hall ; and what do you think ? Why, they found the poor woman was in such earnest, that she had cut off the whole of her beautiful black hair, and there it lay on the carpet, like so much rubbish. So the Squire he swore that he didn't care now whether she starved or not, and turned her out of the house, as I said at first, in a whirlwind. She was very faint and weak ; and Mr. Long, who would never exchange a syllable with her before, made Mrs. Myrtle give her a good meal, and gave her some good words himself, and sent her away to her friends—for it seems she had some friends, poor wretch ; and this has made Sir Massingberd wilder than ever against the rector, whom he had already accused of aiding and abetting young Mr. Marmaduke in his running away ; so that altogether the Squire is ready to make an end of everybody.”

This last statement, although a little highly coloured, as Mrs. Arabel's descriptions usually were, was really not far from the truth. It did almost seem as if the baronet was so transported with passion as to be capable of any enormity. What the law permitted him to do in the way of oppression, that, of course, he practised to the uttermost ; his morality, never very diffuse, had concentrated itself

upon one position—the defence of the game and trespass laws. His keepers were exhorted to increased vigilance; the worst characters in the parish were constituted his spies. Every night, it was now the custom of their lord and master to go the rounds in his own preserves, and visit the outposts, to see that the sentinels did their duty. He employed no Warnings or Trespass Boards in Fairburn Park; his object was not to deter, but to catch the contemnners of the sacred rights of property in the very act. The pursuit of his life had become man-hunting. I write that word without any reference to Marmaduke Heath, for, indeed, at that time I thought that Sir Massingberd had given up all hope of recovering possession of his nephew. A considerable period had now elapsed since the young man's convalescence, and yet the baronet had taken no steps to compel his return. He had written, indeed, to Marmaduke a letter of anything but a conciliatory character, and calculated to re-arouse the lad's most morbid fears; but Mr. Harvey Gerard had intercepted the despatch, and returned it with an answer of his own composition. He had stated briefly the results of the late conference at the Dovecot respecting his young guest; he had reiterated his intention of bringing, in a court of justice, the gravest charges against the baronet, in case of any legal molestation from him; and he had finished with a personal recommendation to that gentleman to rest satisfied with the enjoyment of the allowance that was supposed to go to the maintenance of his nephew. Epistolary communication by hand was rendered impracticable, on the part of the baronet, by the removal of the Dovecot household to town.

This was a bitter blow to the lord of Fairburn; he knew so well the abject fear which he had inspired in my unhappy friend, that, notwithstanding all that had come and gone, yet he did not doubt that a few words in his own handwriting would bring the truant back, however loath. We are living now in such quiet times, and under the protection of such equal laws, that I am aware my younger readers will have a difficulty in conceiving how one human being, however powerful, could be held in such terror by others. I was aware, from the first, that the present universal security would give my narrative an air of improbability, and I fear that this must increase as it proceeds. I have only to say, that at the period of which I write, there was no poor man in Fairburn parish, however honest, however prudent, who might not have been lodged in jail at the instance of his squire, and would have found it difficult to clear himself; or who might not, on a hint from the same quarter, have been pressed, if he did but give the opportunity, on board a man-of-war. I am likewise certain that had Sir Massingberd ventured upon such a step, he might have recovered possession of his nephew, or at least withdrawn him from his protector, by the strong hand of the law, upon the ground of Mr. Gerard's professing revolutionary principles. In these days of Palmerston and Derby, of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, it is impossible for those who are not old enough to have witnessed it, to imagine the rancour of political parties half a century ago, or the despotism and flagrant injustice that were sanctioned under the convenient name of Order.

For the haughty baronet to be thus cut off from
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all intercourse with his victim, was to be foiled indeed. At first, he stung himself well-nigh to frenzy, like a scorpion within its circle of flame; but after a time the white heat of his wrath began apparently to abate. He seemed to have made up his mind to sit down quietly under his defeat, and to content himself with tyrannizing over those who were yet in his power. This comparatively peaceful state of things was looked upon by Mr. Long and myself at first with suspicion, but at last with real satisfaction. When Sir Massingberd sent over five pine-apples and some splendid grapes to the Rectory with his compliments (for the first time within twenty years), we shook our heads, and my tutor addressed the messenger of his bounty in these words: "Tell your master. I am exceedingly obliged to him for his kindness. '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*'"

"Would you be so good as to write that down, sir?" said the man.

"You may give him the message without the tail," replied the rector, a little discomfited at his own indiscretion, but congratulating himself very much that he had expressed his thoughts so classically.

But when pine-apples and grapes became common presents from the Hall, we began really to think that the stubborn old baronet had come to the conclusion that it was as pleasant to be on good terms with his neighbour as not, and that he was genuinely bent on reconciliation. A soft answer is said to be efficacious to this end, but it is nothing compared to hothouse dainties out of season; and notwithstanding all I knew, and all I suspected, I began to regard Sir

Massingberd Heath, not indeed with less contempt and dislike, but with less positive loathing, and certainly with less fear. I had not set foot upon his property since Marmaduke's departure, and the baronet took occasion to stop me as I rode by his gate one day, and remonstrate upon the incivility of such a course of conduct.

"It can do me no damage, young gentleman, that you should take your pleasure in my park, more especially as you are not a sportsman, who would covet my hares and pheasants; and I cannot but think that your omission to do so is a proof of ill-feeling towards me, which I am not conscious of having deserved at your hands."

He spoke stiffly, and without condescension, as a man might speak to an equal, between himself and whom a misunderstanding existed unexplained, but capable of explanation, and, foolish boy as I was, I felt flattered by his behaviour.

If the least notion of making myself out to be a hero had existed in my brain when I began to write these Recollections, it has been dissipated long ago. I have been quite as much surprised during this recital as any of my readers have been, at the contemplation of my own meannesses; if I had known how many and how serious they were to be, perhaps I should have hesitated to recall them; but I commenced with as strong a determination, nothing to extenuate with respect to myself, as to set nothing down in malice with respect to others; and thus I shall proceed to the end.

While, then, matters were on this less antagonistic footing, and when Marmaduke had been away about

a year, business happened to take Mr. Long from Fairburn, and I was left a day and a night my own master. He had not been gone an hour when Mrs. Myrtle came into the study, where I was employed at my books, with a letter in her hand; she looked quite pale and frightened, as she said, "Lor'! Mr. Peter, if this note ain't from Sir Massingberd hisself for *you*. I feels all of a tremble, so as you might knock me down with a peacock's feather."

"Well," said I, forcing a laugh, "but I am not going to use any such weapon, Mrs. Myrtle. What on earth is there to be afraid of in the Squire's handwriting? It can't bite." But I felt in a cold perspiration nevertheless, and my fingers trembled as they undid the missive. It was a polite invitation to dine with the baronet that evening.

"You are not going, sir, I *do* hope!" exclaimed the housekeeper, eagerly, as soon as I had acquainted her with the contents of the note. "Why, such a thing hasn't happened for this quarter of a century. He'll poison you, as sure as my name's Martha Myrtle. I never saw you and master eating his pine-apples without a shudder; the rector *was* uncommon ill after one of them, one day."

"Yes, Mrs. Myrtle," said I, quietly, "and I have suffered also from the same cause myself; but I don't think the Squire was to blame."

"But you ain't a-going, sir; I am sure as master wouldn't like it. Oh, pray, say you ain't a-going."

"Well, then, I won't go, Mrs. Myrtle. The fact is, I feel one of my colds coming on; they generally begin with a lump in my throat; so I shall write to excuse myself."

I really had a lump in my throat; my heart had jumped up and stopped there at the mere notion of a *tête-à-tête* with Sir Massingberd, diversified—no, intensified—by the presence of Grimjaw. I wouldn't have gone through it for a thousand pounds; so I wrote to decline the honour upon the ground of indisposition. I was compelled to keep the house, I said, for the entire day. Half an hour afterwards, another letter arrived from the Hall. Since Sir Massingberd might not enjoy the pleasure of my company at dinner, would I permit him to come over to the Rectory that morning, and have a few words of conversation with me upon a matter deeply interesting to both of us? There was no getting out of this. If I had gone to bed, on plea of illness, I felt that even that course would have been no protection to me. Sir Massingberd would have forced a dying man to play with him at pitch-and-toss, if so inopportune a game had happened to take his fancy. On the other hand, Mrs. Myrtle's suggestion that I should mount my horse, and ride away after Mr. Long, was really too pusillanimous a proceeding; I therefore wrote back to the baronet a polite falsehood, to the effect that I should be very happy to see him; and in a very few minutes afterwards, I was face to face with Marmaduke's foe.

He came in unushered—Mrs. Myrtle not being equal to such an occasion—filling the doorway with his gigantic form, and well-nigh touching the ceiling of the low-roofed room with his head.

"I am sorry to intrude upon an invalid," said he, "but what I had to say was of a private nature, and I was not sure of finding you alone at any other time."

I bowed, and begged my visitor to be seated.

"It is something," thought I, "that this man is civil at least." For there is this great advantage in being habitually insolent and overbearing, that when one does condescend to behave decently, people appreciate one's good manners very much.

"I have called upon you," continued the baronet, "with respect to my nephew and your friend, Marmaduke Heath. It is idle to deny that he and I have not been to one another what our mutual relationship should have led us to be. I am naturally a hard man; losses and poverty have doubtless rendered me more morose. Marmaduke, on the other hand, is of an over-sensitive and morbid nature. We did not get on together at all well. There were faults on both sides; it was six of one, and——"

I shook my head.

"Very well, then," resumed Sir Massingberd, with candour, "let us say that it was I who was in the wrong. I have not the patience and gentleness requisite for dealing with a character like him; my temper is arbitrary; I have behaved with but little courtesy even to yourself. You are polite enough to contradict me, but nevertheless it is true. For *that* however, reparation can be made. I wish that I could as easily make atonement in the other quarter. This, however, I feel is utterly impossible. Things have gone too far. I make no complaint of my nephew's having been encouraged in his rebellious course by one whose duty it was, on the contrary, to reconcile us. I wish to say nothing that could only lead to fruitless discussion, and perhaps a disagreement between you and me; that would be most impolitic on

my part, since I come here to solicit your good offices."

"Mine, Sir Massingberd? mine?"

"Yes, I desire your kindly assistance in bringing about a better understanding between Marmaduke and myself."

"Sir," said I, "what you ask is a sheer impossibility. Marmaduke Heath may be wrong in his estimate of your character, but it will remain unchanged to his dying day. I am as certain of this as that yonder yellowing tree will presently lose its leaves."

"You speak frankly, Mr. Meredith," returned the baronet, calmly, "and I do not respect you less upon that account. It is not, however, as a mediator that I need your assistance; I ask a much less favour than that; I simply wish you to enclose a letter from me to my nephew."

"Sir Massingberd Heath," said I, with some indignation, "you have done me the favour of calling upon me in my tutor's absence, in the expectation of finding me so weak as to be unable to refuse whatever you chose to ask, or so treacherous as to be willing to deceive those who are generously protecting my best friend from one whom he has every cause to fear. I am extremely obliged to you for the compliment;" and with that I laid my hand upon the bell.

"One moment," observed the baronet, quietly, nay, with suavity, though the letter U upon his forehead deepened visibly, and the veins of his great hand, as it rested on the table, grew big with passion; "one moment before you ring. I am sorry you should have taken such a view of my conduct as you

have described; you young men are somewhat hasty in the imputation of motive. I am a straightforward, rough fellow, and may have displeased you; but I am not aware that I have done anything to justify you in accusing me of meanness and duplicity. Those persons who have charge of my nephew are, in my judgment, deeply culpable; but I do not wish you to act deceitfully towards them on that account. Matters have come to that pass, however, that I cannot even communicate with my nephew, even though I have that to say which would give him genuine pleasure. This Mr. Harvey Gerard"—his deep voice shook with hatred as he mentioned that name—"has taken upon himself to return my letters to Marmaduke unopened. I know not how to convey to him even such a one as this."

Sir Massingberd threw across to me a folded sheet, directed to his nephew, and motioned that I should open it. It ran as follows:—

"NEPHEW MARMADUKE,—It seems that you are fully determined never again to seek the shelter of my roof. I am given to understand that the time for reconciliation has gone by, and that any attempt to effect it would only cause you annoyance, and make the breach wider between us. If so, so be it. I am an old man now, and I wish my last years to be passed in peace. I wish to make no allusion to the character of the person with whom you have chosen to reside, further than to express a hope that when I am gone, and it will be your part to exercise the rights of a great landowner, that you will not employ your influence to subvert the laws and the govern-

ment. It is as mad in those who possess authority to countenance revolution, as for a man seated on a lofty branch to lop it off with his own hands. I do not say this as your uncle, but merely as one of an ancient race with whom we are both connected, and in whose welfare we should take an equal interest. Mr. Meredith is kind enough to enclose this parting word of advice—the last communication that will probably ever pass between us—from

“MASSINGBERD HEATH.

“P.S.—Burn this when you have read it, lest your friend should get into trouble upon my account.”

I read and re-read this strange epistle with great care, before I made any comment upon it. There was nothing, to my mind, objectionable in any of the contents. I had been twice to Harley Street during the summer, and found Marmaduke as morbidly apprehensive as ever of some course of conduct to be adopted by his uncle with reference to regaining the custody of his person; he was haunted still by the shadow of this terrible man. The words I held before me were certainly calculated to reassure him. No news could be more gratifying than this positive resignation of the baronet's claim to be his guardian, this final “good-bye” under Sir Massingberd's own hand. As for the political advice, I thought that very healthy. I was then, as now, a staunch conservative, and although I did not sympathize in the least with the harsh acts of the government in respect to poor, misguided men, not without their wrongs, yet I did think Mr. Gerard's views both visionary and dangerous.

"I trust," observed Sir Massingberd, gravely, "that the sentiments which you are now perusing are in accordance with your own. I am speaking, I believe, to a gentleman, and consequently to a natural friend of order."

I bowed in assent. "There certainly seems nothing in this epistle which Marmaduke might not read," muttered I, musing.

"*Seems?*" cried the baronet. "Why not say *is* at once?"

A sudden idea, gleaned from some romance which I had been lately reading, flashed across my brain. Why did the postscript say, "Burn this when you have read it?" I let my hand, with the letter in it, drop below my knee, so that the missive was held close to the fire.

"There is no writing in lemon-juice, I do assure you," observed Sir Massingberd, quietly; "you will only scorch the paper."

I coloured at the exposure of my suspicions, and in my confusion it did not strike me that the speaker must himself have at least entertained such a project, or he never could have unmasked me so readily; I was a little ashamed of myself, and rather sorry for my incredulity. Sir Massingberd saw this, and pressed his point.

"Since there is nothing concealed, and no harm in what is visible, I do hope you will grant the favour I requested, and enclose that note to my nephew."

"Well, sir," said I, after a little hesitation, "I will enclose it. I give you warning, however, that I shall send a line by the same post to let Mr. Gerard know that I have done so."

"By all means," responded Sir Massingberd. "I am only anxious that my nephew's own eyes should read what I have written. Have you a taper and wax?" asked he, folding up the sheet. "I might as well stamp it with my seal."

I rose and brought what he required from a writing-table. Sir Massingberd sealed the letter, and gave it into my hand.

"Mr. Meredith," said he, rising, "you have done me a great service. I think I have said that the oftener you make use of my grounds the better I shall be pleased. Did I add that the bowling-green is entirely at your service? I am too stiff in the back to have a game with you myself, but I will give directions to Gilmore to be your antagonist, whenever you may feel inclined."

The baronet took his leave in a stately, but not unfriendly manner. He certainly *was* stiff in the back; but that was his nature. As he smiled, his lip turned upwards, instead of the usual way; but so it always did. Yet I did not feel quite comfortable, as I stood by myself over the fire, balancing Sir Massingberd's "good-bye" to his nephew in my hand, and questioning within myself whether it wouldn't be better to enclose it to Mr. Harvey Gerard, after all. However, in the end I kept my promise.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF MIND, OUT OF SIGHT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the baronet's polite invitation, and although Mr. Long did not return as expected upon the ensuing morning, I felt no inclination to exchange my solitude for the society of Mr. Gilmore at bowls. I was, indeed, rather curious to see the bowling-green, which I had heard from my tutor was one of the very finest in England, fenced in by wondrous walls of yew; but to arrive there it was necessary to pass close to the Hall, and consequently to run great risk of meeting Sir Massingberd, my repugnance to whom had returned with tenfold strength since the preceding day. My reason, it is true, could suggest no possible harm from my having enclosed his letter to Marmaduke, but still an indefinable dread of what I had done oppressed me. I could not imagine in what manner I could have been outwitted; but a certain malignant exultation in Sir Massingberd's face when he was taking his leave haunted my memory, and rendered hateful the idea of meeting it again. Moreover, the companionship of Gilmore, the butler, was not attractive. He bore a very bad character with the villagers, among whom he was said to emulate in a humble manner the vices of his lord and master. He had been his companion and confidential servant for a great number of years; and it

was not to be wondered at, even supposing that he commenced that servitude as an honest man, that his principles should have been sapped by the communication.

Those who had known Richard Gilmore best and longest, however, averred that his nature had not been the least impaired by this companionship, inasmuch as it had been always as bad as bad could be. I never saw his pale, secretive face, with the thin lips tightly closed as if to prevent the escape of one truant word, without reflecting what a repository of dark and wicked deeds that keeper of Sir Massingberd's conscience needs must be. Such men usually hold such masters in their own hands, for they know too much about them; and it is that species of knowledge which, above all others, is power. But it was not so in this case. The antecedents of Gilmore's master were probably as evil as those of any person who has ever kept a valet; but there was this peculiarity about the baronet, that he cared little or nothing whether people knew them or not. When a thoroughly unprincipled man has arrived at the stage of being entirely indifferent to what his fellow-creatures think of him, he has touched his zenith—he is as much a hero to his *valet-de-chambre* as to anybody else. It was Gilmore's nature to be reticent; but for all Sir Massingberd cared he might have ascended the steps at the stone cross at Crittenden upon market-day, and held forth upon the subject of his master's peccadillos. Sir Massingberd stood no more in fear of him than of any other man, otherwise he would scarcely have used such frightful language to him as he did whenever the spirit-case had not been

properly replenished, or he happened to mislay the key of his own cigar-chest. It was no delicate tending that the lord of Fairburn Hall required—no accurate arrangement of evening garments ere he returned from shooting—no slippers placed in front of the fire. As he was attired in the morning, so he remained throughout the day; and if it were the poaching season, throughout the night also. He never was ill, and only very rarely was he so overcome with liquor as to require any assistance in retiring. The putting Sir Massingberd to bed must have been a bad quarter of an hour for Mr. Gilmore. I have mentioned that when I paid my only visit to the Hall, the front-door bell was answered by the butler with very commendable swiftness, under the impression that it was his master; and, indeed, it was rumoured that, on more than one occasion, the baronet had felled his faithful domestic like an ox, for dilatoriness. Wonder was sometimes expressed that Mr. Gilmore, who was supposed, as the phrase goes, to have feathered his nest very agreeably during his master's prosperous days, should cleave to him in his present poverty—the mere sentiment of attachment being deemed scarcely strong enough to retain his gratuitous services. But the reply commonly made to this was, I have no doubt, correct—namely, that however matters might seem, Mr. Richard Gilmore, we might be well assured, knew his own business best, and on which side his bread was buttered.

Sagacious, however, as this gentleman doubtless was, I did not fancy him as a companion to play bowls with; and, instead of going in the direction of the bowling-green, I took my way to Fairburn

Chase. I had not set foot within it for more than a year, and the season was much further advanced than when I had last been there. The stillness which pervaded it in the summer time was now broken by the flutter of the falling leaf and the splash of the chestnuts on the moist and sodden ground; the autumn rains had long set in; there was that "drip, drip, drip," in the woods which so mournfully reminds us that the summer, with all its life and warmth, has passed away; and the dank earth was sighing from beneath its load of tangled leaves, which "hanging so light and hanging so high," but lately danced in the sunny air. The presentiment of evil which overshadowed me was deepened by the melancholy of Nature. I moved slowly through the dripping fern towards the heronry; from the little island suddenly flew forth, not the stately birds who ordinarily reigned there, but a pair of ravens. I knew that such had taken up their residence in the old church tower, for I had seen them flying in and out of its narrow ivied window-slits; but their appearance in the present locality was most unexpected. I was far from being superstitious, but I would rather have seen any other birds just then. A few steps further brought me to that bend in the stream which had been such a favourite haunt of mine before I had dreamed there so unpleasantly. The lime-trees stood ragged and bare, and weeping silently, deprived of their summer bee-music; the sparkling sand, wherein I had seen the mysterious footprints, was dark and damp; a few steps further brought me to the stepping-stones, by which that unknown visitant must have crossed over, if she were indeed of mortal

mould; the wood upon the other side was no longer impenetrable to sight; and through its skeleton arms I could see some building of considerable size at no great distance. I knew where such of the keepers and gardeners as lived upon the estate resided, and it puzzled me to imagine to what purpose this cottage was assigned.

While I hesitated as to whether I should cross the turbid and swollen current, whose waters almost entirely covered the stepping stones, a laugh prolonged and shrill burst forth from the very direction in which I was looking. It was the same mocking cry, never to be forgotten, which I had heard at that very spot some fifteen months before. Anywhere else, I should have recognized it; but in that place it was impossible to doubt its identity. Knife-like, it clove the humid and unwilling air; and before the sound had ceased, a short, sharp shriek succeeded it—the cry of a smitten human creature. In a moment I had crossed the stream, and was forcing my way through the wood. As I drew nearer, I perceived the edifice before me was of stone, and with a slated roof, instead of being built with clay, and thatched, as were the rest of Sir Massingberd's cottages. There was no attempt at ornamentation, but the place was unusually substantial for its size, the door being studded with nails, while the window upon either side of it was protected by iron bars.

I was just emerging from the fringe of the wood, when another sound smote on my ear, which caused me to pause at once, and remain where the trunk of an elm-tree intervened between me and the cottage; it was merely the bark of a dog, but it checked

my philanthropic enthusiasm upon the instant. There was no mistaking that wheezy note, telling of canine infirmity, and days prolonged far beyond the ordinary span of dogs. Besides, there was but one dog permitted to be at large in Fairburn Chase. It was the execrable Grimjaw. I could see him from my place of concealment turning his almost sightless eyes in my direction, as he sat at the cottage door. Immediately afterwards it opened, and out came Richard Gilmore; he looked about him suspiciously, but having convinced himself that there was nobody in the neighbourhood, he administered a kick to Grimjaw's ribs, reproached him in strong language for having made a causeless disturbance, and turning the key, and pocketing it, walked away by a foot-path that doubtless led, although by no means directly, to the Hall. He had a dog-whip in his hand when I first saw him, which I thought was an odd thing for a butler to carry, and he seemed to think so, too, for he put it in a side pocket before he started, and buttoned it up. Grimjaw, gathering his stiffened limbs together, slowly followed him, not without turning his grey head ever and anon towards my covert, but without venturing again to express his suspicions. I waited until the charming pair were out of sight, ere I advanced to the cottage.

The door, of course, was fast; so, approaching the right-hand window, I cautiously looked in through its iron bars; there was no casement whatever, therefore all the objects which the room contained were as clear to me as though I were in it. I beheld a sitting-room, the furniture of which was costly, and had

been evidently intended for a much larger apartment, but which in variety was scanty enough. At a mahogany table, which retained little more of polish than if it had just been sawn from its trunk in Honduras, sat an ancient female, with her back towards me, supporting her chin on both hands ; a cold chicken in a metal dish was before her, but neither a plate nor knife and fork ; she was muttering something in a low tone to herself, which, if it was a grace, must have been a very long one. Her hair was scanty, and white as snow, but hung down almost to the ground ; she was miserably thin ; and her clothes, although they had once been of rich material, were ragged and old.

I had made no noise, as I thought, in my approach ; and the day was so dull and dark that she could scarcely have perceived my presence by any shadow of my eavesdropping self ; but no sooner had I set my eyes on her than she began to speak, without looking round, imagining, doubtless, that I was Gilmore. "So you are there again, peeping and prying, are you, wicked thief?" cried she. "Don't you know that a real lady should take her meals in peace without being interrupted, especially after she has been beaten? Think of that, you cur. Why, where's your whip?" She uttered these last words with a yell of scorn ; and turning suddenly, with one arm raised as if to ward a blow, she met my unexpected face, and I saw hers. So remarkable was her appearance, that although it was she, not I, who was taken by surprise, I think I was the more astounded of the two. Her countenance was that of an old woman, so wrinkled, or rather shrivelled up, that the furrows might have

represented the passage of a century of time; yet the teeth were as white and regular as in a young beauty, and the black beaded eyes had a force and fire in them unquenched by age. In her thin puckered ears hung a pair of monstrous gilded ornaments, and round her skinny neck was a necklace such as a stage queen would wear; yet she had naked feet.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" observed she, with a grave distinctness, in strong contrast to her late excited and mocking tones. "If I had known that you were coming, young gentleman, I would have put on my bracelets. The family jewels are not all gone to the pawnbroker's, as is generally believed. Besides, you should never insult people because they are poor, or mad; one would not be either one or the other, you know, if one could help it."

"Heaven forbid, madam, that I should offer you any insult," said I, touched by the evident misfortune of this poor creature. "I merely ran hither because I heard the cry, as I thought, of some one in distress."

"Ab, that was the dog, sir," replied the old woman cheerfully; "the butler was correcting his dog, and it howled a little. Of course it could not have been me—certainly not; Sir Massingberd is so excessively anxious that I should have everything that is good for me; he said that with his own lips. And what a handsome mouth he has, except when he looks at *you*."

"Why at me?" cried I. "He has no cause to dislike me, has he?"

"No cause!" cried the old woman, coming closer

to the bars, and lowering her voice to a confidential whisper. "Oh no—not if you were dead. I never wished you worse than myself; no, not when my poor baby died, and I could not weep. I feel that now; if I could only weep, as in the good old times with my husband! There was plenty of good weeping then—plenty."

"But why should you wish me dead, madam, who have never done you any harm?"

"No harm? What, not to have taken the title from my boy? No harm, when, but for you, he would have been the heir to house and land! Why, look you, if it had not been for something, I would have driven Gilmore's knife into you that day when you were sleeping under the limes. That was the very place where I used to meet my love—let me see, how many years ago?"

The eager eyes for one instant ceased to glitter; some fragment of a memory of the past claimed the restless brain; then once more she rambled on. "One, two, three, four—he never struck me more than four times; that's true, I swear."

"And what was the something that prevented you from killing me when I was asleep by the heron's island?" inquired I.

"What was it?" replied the old woman sadly. "Did you not cry, 'Mother, mother,' in your sleep, to make me think of my boy? I wept at that; just one tear. He might have been such another as yourself—with the same—— Why, what's the matter with your forehead? What have you done with your horseshoe? Every Heath wears one of them; then why not you, young Marmaduke?"

"My name is not Heath," said I; "you are taking me for somebody else."

"Dear me—dear me, what a mistake! The fact is, that living in a house affects one's sight. Now, let me guess. If you are not Marmaduke Heath, you must be—— What a dark skin you have, and what kind eyes!" She looked suspiciously round the room, and laying her finger on her lip, observed beneath her breath: "You are not Stanley Carew, are you? They told me he was hung, but I know better than that. I have seen him since a hundred times. To be hung for nothing must be a terrible thing; but how much worse to be hung for love!"

"I am not Stanley Carew," said I; "I am Peter Meredith, who lives with Mr. Long at the Rectory."

"I never happen to have heard your name before, sir," replied the old woman mincingly; "perhaps you have never heard mine. Permit me to introduce myself. Don't suppose that our people don't know good manners; I am Sinnamenta—Lady Heath."

"Madam," said I, deeply moved, "I apprehended as much. If I can do you any service, be sure that the will shall not be wanting. Pray, tell me what shall I do?"

"Well," returned the poor creature quickly, "Marmaduke Heath should be killed at once, that is all important. We have been thinking of nothing else, my husband and I. But perhaps you have done it already." (How I shrank from that random shaft!) "If so, I have no further desire except to get out. If I could only be once more in the greenwood, my hair would reassume its natural colour. That is why Mr. Gilmore is so careful to keep me thus locked up. If

my husband only saw me with my black hair again—it reached to the ground, sir—matters would be very different. I think I have already observed that it is not customary to watch a lady while she is partaking of refreshment.”

With that she once more seated herself at the table, with her back to me ; and judging thereby that my presence was distasteful to her, and having no notion of how I could possibly give her any aid, I withdrew from the sad scene. I had not, however, gone many steps, when she called me back again through the iron bars.

“ Mr. Meredith,” said she, “ you arrived somewhat unexpectedly. It is to that circumstance alone, I beg to repeat, that you must attribute the absence of bracelets. My very best regards to all your family, Sinnamenta, you know—Lady Heath.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARLEY STREET.

WHILE I was thus passing my time at Fairburn, at work with my tutor, in rides rendered doubly lonesome by contrast with those made so enjoyable by the company of my friend, or in rambles about the solitary Chase, the course of true love was running more smoothly in Harley Street than it is fabled to do. During each of my visits there, I had perceived its silent increase even more clearly than those between whom it was growing up into the perfect flower, leaf by leaf, and bud by bud; they had tended it together—Marmaduke and Lucy—until it was well nigh in blossom, and yet they had not said to one another, and perhaps not even to themselves, “Why, this is surely Love.” Mr. Gerard had watched it, not displeased, for he had found the young man all that my heart had foretold that he would; Mr. Clint had seen it, and won by the strong sense, as much as by the beauty of the gentle girl, forgot the revolutionary stock of which she came. This, thought he, is the wife for Marmaduke Heath; tender, but yet determined; dutiful, but indisposed to submit to unauthorized dictation; as fearless as kind. In her, once wedded to this young man, so morbid, so sensitive, so yielding, Sir Massingberd would find, if it should be necessary, not only a foe, resolute herself,

but as firm as steel for him whom she had dowered with her love. What Marmaduke's nature wanted, hers would supply. The keen lawyer foresaw for that unhappy family, whose interests he and his had had in keeping so many scores of years, a future such as had never been promised before. It was an admission painful to me enough at that time, but which I could not conceal from myself, that the real obstacle which prevented the open recognition of attachment between these two young people was Marmaduke himself. No girl more modest or less forward than Lucy Gerard ever breathed, but I knew—ah, how well I knew!—that a word from him would have brought the love-light to her eyes, which now lay waiting but for it in the careful keeping of her maiden heart. But that word had not been spoken. Perfect love Marmaduke did not yet feel, for he had not quite cast out fear. How can a man offer heart and hand to a woman whom he does not feel certain that he can protect? It is for this reason that marriage among slaves must for ever be a mockery. There was, of course, no danger to Lucy Gerard in her marrying with Marmaduke, although his uncle should storm "No" a thousand times; but the young man felt that he was unworthy of her, while he entertained any terror of him. It was wearing away; it was weakening day by day, through genial influences, and the absence of all things which reminded him of Fairburn and its master; but it was not dead yet. If by these words, I lead any of my readers to suppose that Marmaduke Heath had the least resemblance to that thing which is called a Coward, I have done my friend a grievous wrong.

Let me do away with the possibility of this most mistaken notion, at once and for ever, by the recital of an event which, although it does not come within the scope of the present narrative, nearly concerns one of its most important characters.

After the peace in 1815, there were more officers—English and French—killed in single combat in Paris than in any one of the most bloody battles of the late war. This desire to exterminate individual Englishmen extended over the whole of France. A certain gentleman of my acquaintance, then a very young man, chanced to be passing through a town in Normandy, where an assemblage was collected outside the office of the mayor. This arose from the very uncommon circumstance that that functionary had been appealed to by a post-captain in the English navy to punish a bullying Frenchman, who had striven to fasten a quarrel upon him, although entirely unprovoked on his part.

Now-a-days, the captain would have been held to have behaved rightly enough, perhaps, but in those fire-eating times an honest man's life was at the mercy of every worthless ruffian who chose to run an equal risk with him from powder and bullet. The decision, wonderful to relate, was given by the mayor against his compatriot, and the crowd were correspondingly enraged. My friend, whose nationality was apparent, was hustled and ill-treated, and one person, well-dressed, and evidently of good position, knocked his hat off, observing at the same time: "You will complain of me to the mayor for that."

"Certainly not," returned the young Englishman quietly, picking his hat up, all broken and muddy,

from the trampled ground: "I shall treat you very differently."

"You will fight, will you? Come—I challenge you. Let us fight to-morrow morning," exclaimed the bully, who was, as it turned out, a notorious provincial duellist.

"Not to-morrow, but now," rejoined my friend; "I have no time to wait here, for I must be in Paris on Tuesday."

"Then it will be in Père la Chaise," responded the other brutally.

There was no difficulty in procuring seconds, which were even more plentiful in those parts than principals, and the whole party immediately left the town for a wood outside its suburbs. The choice of weapons, of course, lay with the Englishman.

"Which do you prefer," asked the Frenchman who acted as his friend upon the occasion—"the pistol or the sword?"

"I have never fired a pistol in my life," replied the Englishman, "nor handled a sword."

"Heavens!" cried his second, "what a barbarous education, what a stupendous ignorance! You are as good as dead, I fear. I know not which to recommend you. It is, however, at least sooner over with the pistol."

"The pistol be it, then," said the Englishman, coolly. "I elect that only one shall be loaded; and that we fire within four paces of one another. We shall then have an equal chance."

The duellist turned pale as the death that threatened him, but he did not venture to make any objection. It was manifest no other proposal would

have been fair. The seconds went apart, and placed powder and ball in one weapon, powder only in the other. The combatants drew lots for choice. The Frenchman won. The pistols were lying on a log of wood; he advanced towards them, took one up in his hand, and retired with it, then once more came back, and exchanged it for the other. He fancied that the weapon was lighter than it should have been if it had a ball within it. My friend's second objected strongly to this course; he called it even unfair and shameful; he protested that the pistol taken first ought to be retained. But the young Englishman, who was leaning carelessly against a tree, exclaimed, "Let the gentleman have which he likes. Whether he is right or not will be decided in a few seconds." So the combatants were placed opposite to one another, and advanced to within four paces. They raised their weapons; the word was given to fire, and the Frenchman fell, pierced through the heart.

"His blood is upon his own head," exclaimed the other solemnly. "He was brave enough to have been a better man." Then perceiving that his help could be of no avail to his late antagonist, he lifted his battered hat to the Frenchman that remained alive, and returning to his carriage, immediately resumed his journey.

It is not possible, without putting some very strained and unusual meaning on the word, to call the hero of such an adventure a coward; yet the man who acted thus was Marmaduke Heath.

The above relation is but a clumsy method of proving him courageous, I am well aware; but I really know not otherwise how to make him appear

so, slave, as it is seen he was, to terrors which must seem almost imaginary. It is said that no man, however fearless, quite gets over his awe of his school-master. An exaggeration of this sentiment probably possessed this unfortunate young man; added to which was the fact that Sir Massingberd was his uncle, a family tie which was doubtless not without its influence, notwithstanding Marmaduke's evil opinion of his own race. I suspect, too, he entertained a morbid notion that his own life and that of his relative were somehow bound up together in one; and on the few occasions when I ever saw him moved to wrath a similarity—mental as well as physical—between him and his uncle became apparent, which actually inspired him with a sort of awe and hatred of *himself*. A noble mind more injured and misshapen by ill-training it was impossible to imagine. For the last few months, however, as I have said, it had been growing aright, and gaining strength and vigour. No home—even Mr. Clint and my tutor felt that—could possibly be better adapted for him than his present one; the society of Mr. Gerard, a man independent almost to audacity, and despising the haughty and the strong with a supreme contempt, was the very tonic he needed. Rarely, however, was his uncle's name mentioned in his presence: at first, Mr. Gerard had purposely spoken of Sir Massingberd lightly and jestingly, but it was found that the subject had better be altogether avoided. It is ill to jest upon earthquakes with one who, having but just recovered from certain shocks of a volcanic nature, is not without apprehensions of more to come. This anticipation turned out to be but too well grounded.

A day or two after my discovery of the baronet's poor gipsy-wife at Fairburn, whose existence was well known, I found, to both the rector and Mr. Clint, and of course to Marmaduke himself, the postman carried misfortune from me to Harley Street, although I was myself as unconscious of the fact as he. Marmaduke did not come in to luncheon from his study, as usual, and Mr. Gerard was sent with a gay message to him by Lucy, to bid him do so. He was not wanted, he was to be assured, upon his own account at all, but she was dying to hear news of Peter, whose handwriting she had perceived upon the letter that had been sent in to him that morning. Mr. Gerard found the poor lad with his eyes riveted upon an autograph that was not mine, and upon words that I would rather have cut off my hand than knowingly have sent him:—

“NEPHEW MARMADUKE,—I am told, whether falsely or not, it does not matter now, that you have not seen the letter which I previously sent to you. I think you can scarcely have done so, or you would not have dared to disobey my orders therein contained, but would have returned to Fairburn long ago. At all events, you will read *this* with your own eyes, and beware how you hesitate to comply with it. *Return hither, sir, at once.* It is idle to suppose that I wish you harm, as those you are with would fain persuade you; but it is far worse than idle to attempt to cross my will. Come back to Fairburn, and I will behave towards you as though you had not acted in your late undutiful manner. Delay to do so, and be sure that you will still have to return, but

under very different circumstances. Marmaduke Heath, you should know me well by this time. When I say 'Come,' it is bad for the person to whom I speak to reply, 'I will not come.' I give you twenty-four hours to arrive here after the receipt of this letter; when these have elapsed without my seeing you, I shall consider your absence to be equivalent to a contumacious refusal. Then war will begin between us; and the strife will be unequal, Nephew Marmaduke; although you had fifty men at your back like lawyer Clint and this man Gerard, they could not keep you from my arm. It will reach you wheresoever you are, at the time you least suspect it, and from the quarter to which you have least looked. However well it may seem to be with you, it will not be well. When you think yourself safest you will be most in danger. There is indeed but one place of safety for you: come you home.

"MASSINGBERD HEATH."

The wily baronet had fooled me, and doubtless, when I rose to light the taper, had substituted the above letter for that which he had persuaded me to enclose to his unhappy nephew.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEFORE THE BLOW.

As yet in ignorance of the mischief which I had unwittingly done to my dearest friend, I could not but wonder why I received no news from Harley Street. I had confessed to Mr. Long what Sir Massingberd had persuaded me to do, and although he had thought me wrong to have acted without consulting him in the matter, he anticipated no evil consequences. He rather sought to laugh me out of my own forebodings and presentiments. Still there was this somewhat suspicious corroboration of them, that the new-born courtesies of our formidable neighbour had suddenly ceased, as though the end for which they had been used was already attained. The baronet's manner towards us was as surly as ever, and even a trifle more so, as if to recompense himself for his previous constrained politeness. To myself, his manner was precisely that of a man who does not attempt to conceal his contempt for one whom he has duped. Since Marmaduke's departure, there had gone forth various decrees, injunctions, and what not, from the Court of Chancery, obtained doubtless through Mr. Clint, on behalf of the heir presumptive, against certain practices of Sir Massingberd connected with the estate. Formerly he had done what he chose, not only with "his own," but with what was not his

own in the eye of the law. But Marmaduke's reversionary rights were now strictly protected. Not a tree in the park could fall beneath the axe, but the noise thereof reached the Chancellor's ears, and brought down reproof, and even threats, upon the incensed baronet. His hesitation to institute proceedings for the recovery of his ward had given confidence to his opponents; and Mr. Gerard was not one to suffer the least wrong to be committed with impunity; it was out of his pocket that the expenses came for the edicts necessary to enforce compliance, and I have heard him say that he never remembered to have spent any money with greater personal satisfaction.

This "thinning the timber" (as Sir Massingberd euphoniously termed cutting down the most ornamental trees, in his excusatory despatches), having been put a stop to, the squire took to selling the family plate. A quantity of ancient silver, with the astonished Griffins upon it, was transferred from the custody of Gilmore to that of certain transmuters of metal in town, and came back again to Fairburn Hall in the shape of gold pieces. But even the melting-pot was compelled to disclose its secrets; and the squire received such a severe reprimand upon the text of heir-looms, as made him writhe with passion, and which put an end to any friendly connexion that might have before existed between himself and John, Lord Eldon, at once and for ever. I think it must have been immediately after the receipt of that very communication, that Sir Massingberd came over to the rectory upon the following errand. Mr. Long and myself were at our "Tacitus"

in the study one evening, when the baronet was announced, and I rose to leave the room. "Stay where you are, young gentleman," said he roughly; "what I have to say will, it is like enough, soon be no secret to anybody. Mr. Long, I must tell you at once that money I must have. The way in which my property is meddled with by the lawyer in London, set on to do it by friends of yours, too, is beyond all bearing. I declare to you, that I—Sir Massingberd Heath, the nominal owner of twenty thousand acres, and of a rent-roll of half as many thousand pounds—have not five guineas in my pocket at this moment, nor do I know how to raise them. Now, am I a man, think you, to sit down with my hands before me, and submit to such a state of things as this?"

"Really, Sir Massingberd, I cannot say," returned my tutor; "I cannot see how I can help you in any way."

"Yes, you *can* help me, sir. You have influence with those persons—curse them!—who have taken it in hand to do me these injuries, who have interfered between uncle and nephew, between guardian and ward. Now, I have made up my mind what I will do, and I am come here to let you know it. You pretend to entertain some regard towards your late pupil, Marmaduke."

"The regard is genuine, Sir Massingberd. I wish others entertained the like, who are more nearly connected with him than by the bond of pupil and tutor."

"Pray put me out of the question," returned the baronet coolly. "What I have to say concerns

others, not myself. You like this lad, and wish him well; you hope for him an unclouded future; you trust that the character of the family will be redeemed in his virtuous hands, and that the remembrance of what it has been will not cleave to him, but will gradually die out."

"That is my earnest desire," replied Mr. Long gravely.

"I am glad to hear it," continued the other; "and I suppose Mr. Clint cherishes some similar notion; and this man Gerard—this rebel, this hypocrite——"

"Sir Massingberd Heath," said I, interrupting him, "you have bidden me stay here; but I shall not remain to listen to slanders against Mr. Harvey Gerard; he is no hypocrite, but a very honest and kind-hearted man."

"He has hoodwinked this young wiseacre already, you see," pursued the baronet. "His object is evidently to secure the heir of Fairburn for his daughter; I have not the least doubt the jade is making play with the poor molly-coddle as fast as——"

Mr. Long and myself both rose before the speaker could finish the sentence. My tutor checked with his finger the wrathful words that were at my lips, and observed with energy, "Sir Massingberd, be silent! Under my roof, you shall not traduce that virtuous and excellent young girl."

I never saw Mr. Long so excited; I never admired him so much. The baronet paused, as though hesitating whether it was worth while to indulge himself in uttering insults; I am thankful to say he decided that it was not. It would have been pollution

to Lucy Gerard's name to have heard it spoken by such lips.

"Well, well," returned he, "I have nothing to say against the young woman. It is probable, however, you will allow, that some attachment may arise between herself and my nephew. You grant that, do you? Ah, I thought so. In that case, Mr. Gerard would prefer the husband of his daughter to be free from all stain. Good! There are three persons then, at least, all interested in my nephew's good name. Now, listen: you know something, parson, of the mode of life pursued by the Heaths from generation to generation; you know something of the deeds that have been committed at Fairburn Hall. What is known, however, is honourable and harmless compared to what is *not* known; the vices which you have shuddered at are mere follies—the offspring of idleness and high spirits—compared to those of which you have yet to hear."

It is impossible to imagine a more repulsive spectacle than this man presented, exulting not only in his own wickedness, but in that of his forefathers. He took from his pocket a huge manuscript, and thus proceeded: "The records of the House of Heath are red with blood, and black with crime. I hold them in my hand here, and they are very pretty reading. Now, look you, I will leave them here for your perusal, parson—they have at least this attraction about them, they are *true*—and when you have made yourself master of the contents, perhaps you can recommend to me a publisher."

"Is it possible," cried my tutor, "that you can do this dreadful wrong at once to ancestors and

descendant? Have you no mercy even for kith and kin? Do you dare to defy God and Man alike?"

"I dare publish that pamphlet, unless I have money," quoth Sir Massingberd scornfully, "and that is the sole question with which we need now concern ourselves. A pretty welcome young Sir Marmaduke will meet with when he comes into the country among all who know his family history. As for me, my character is one which is not likely to suffer from any disclosure."

"Are all the murders done and attempted set down here, Sir Massingberd?" inquired my tutor, taking up the pamphlet. "The catalogue of crime is truly frightful; but you do not seem to have brought the narrative down to the most recent dates."

"The most recent dates?" reiterated the baronet mechanically.

"Yes, sir," responded my tutor, "the history is evidently incomplete. If it should come out in its present form, it would need an appendix. I would scarcely recommend you to run the risk of another person publishing a continuation. You had better take it home, and reconsider the matter."

The baronet affected to receive this advice in earnest, and retired, foiled and furious.¹ He never more set foot in the Rectory, save twice; once when he called upon me, and persuaded me to forward that

¹ Years afterwards I became possessed of the pamphlet in question, which, having glanced at, I very carefully committed to the flames. I do not doubt, however, that Sir Massingberd would have carried his threat into execution, had not Mr. Long's menace shaken his purpose.

hateful letter to Marmaduke, and again upon the occasion I am about to describe. The errand he then came upon was of small consequence, but the circumstance I shall never forget. After-events have made it one of the most memorable in my life, for it was the last time, save one, that I ever beheld Massingberd Heath. Little did I think what a mystery was then impending—so frightful, so unexampled, that it now seems almost strange that it did not visibly overshadow that giant form, that ruthless face. If we could thus read the future of others, how fearful would be many a meeting which is now so conventional and commonplace! It is true that we should always part both from friends and from enemies, in some sort as though we were parting with them for the last time; but how different a leave-taking would it be, if we were indeed assured that they and we would meet no more upon this side the grave! How I should have devoured that man with mine eyes, had I known that they would not again behold him—save one awful Once—before we should both stand together in the presence of God! What terrors, what anxieties, what enigmas were about to be brought to us and to others by the morrow's sun! Yet, at the time, with what little things we occupied ourselves! It was in the morning that Sir Massingberd paid his visit—a morning of early November, when the first sharp frost had just set in. He came about money matters, as usual. We were surprised to see him, because, as I have said, he had relapsed into his accustomed stern, unsociable habits, and had seemed to have given up all attempts to gain any furtherance of his plans from Mr. Long.

He had called, he said, about a matter that affected the parson himself, or he would not have troubled him. Certain Methodists had offered him twenty pounds a year as the ground-rent of a chapel to be built upon the outskirts of the Park, and within view of the Rectory windows. For his part, he hated the Methodists; and had no sort of wish to offend Mr. Long by granting their prayer. Still, being grievously in want of money, he had come to say that if Mr. Clint could not be induced to give him some pecuniary help, the chapel must be built.

My tutor, who had a very orthodox abhorrence of all dissent, and especially when it threatened his own parish, was exceedingly disturbed by this intelligence.

"What!" cried he; "you preach to your nephew doctrines of Conservatism, Sir Massingberd, and yet are induced for a wretched bribe to let a nest of sectaries be built in the very avenue of your Park!"

"It is terrible indeed," quoth the baronet drily; "but they might set it up opposite my front door for an extra five-pound note. I announce their offer solely on your account. They call on me to-morrow for my final decision, and I cannot afford to say 'No.' Now, you can do what you please with Mr. Clint, and may surely represent to him that this is a case where twenty pounds may be well expended. The matter will thus be staved off for a year at least; and next year, you know, I may be in better circumstances—or dead, which many persons would greatly prefer."

"Certainly," returned my tutor gravely, "I will do my best with Mr. Clint; but in the meantime,

rather than let this chapel be built, I will advance the money you mention at my own risk. I happen to have a considerable sum in the house at present, which I intended to lodge with the bank at Crittenden to-morrow. So you shall have the notes at once."

"This is very fortunate," said the baronet coolly; and Mr. Long counted them out into his hand—twenty flimsy, but not yet ragged, one-pound notes, for the imitation of the like of which half-a-dozen men were at that time often strung up in front of the Old Bailey together. From 82,961 to 82,980 the numbers ran, which—albeit I am no great hand at recollecting such things—I shall remember, from what followed, as long as I live. I can see the grim Squire now, as he rolls them tightly up, and places them in that huge, lapelled waistcoat-pocket; as he slaps it with his mighty hand, as though he would defy the world to take them from him, however unlawfully acquired; as he leaves the room with an insolent nod, and clangs across the iron road with his nailed shoes.

I watch him through the Rectory window, as, ere he puts the key in his garden-door, he casts a chance look-up at the sky. He looks to see what will happen on the morrow. Does he read nothing save Continuance of Fine and Frosty Weather? Nothing. All is blue and clear as steel; not a cloud to be seen the size of a man's hand from north to south, from east to west. There is no warning to be read in the cold and smiling heaven; no "*Lene, mene*," for this worse than Belshazzar on its broad cerulean wall!

CHAPTER XX.

LOST.

THE morning subsequent to Sir Massingberd's visit to the Rectory was bright, but intensely cold. I was very particular about my shaving in those days, and would not have dispensed with that manly exercise upon any account; but I remembered that the frost made it a difficult process. In the course of the ceremony, Mrs. Myrtle, who was a very privileged person, knocked softly at my door. A visit from her at such a time was unusual, but not unprecedented. I said, "Pray, come in." My attire was tolerably complete, and perhaps I was not indisposed to let people know what tremendous difficulties were entailed upon a gentleman by the possession of an obstinate beard. I was not prepared for her closing the door behind her, sinking into the nearest chair, and fanning herself, as though it had been midsummer, with her outspread fingers. I looked at her with a face all soap-suds and astonishment.

"My dear Mrs. Myrtle, what is the matter?"

"Oh, don't ask me, Master Peter," cried she, although she had come for no other purpose than to be cross-questioned. "Oh, pray, don't, for it's more nor I can bear. Dearey me, if I ain't all of a twitter!"

"Nothing the matter with your master," said I,

"surely ? I saw him out of the window a little while ago on the lawn, talking to one of the under-keepers of the Hall."

"I dare say you did, sir," quoth Mrs. Myrtle, with one of those aggravated shudders which are generally produced by the anticipation of senna and salts. "No, master's all well, thank Heaven."

"No bad news from Harley Street ?" exclaimed I, laying down my razor in a tremor. "I trust Miss —— I mean that Mr. Marmaduke is as he should be."

"For all that I know to the contrary, he is, sir," returned the housekeeper ; "and likewise all *friends*." Mrs. Myrtle laid such an accent upon "friends" that my mind naturally rushed to the opposite.

"You don't mean to say," said I, "that anything has happened to Sir Massingberd ?"

Mrs. Myrtle had no voice to speak, but she nodded a number of times in compensation.

"Is he DEAD ?" asked I, very solemnly, for it was terrible to think of sudden death in connexion with that abandoned man.

"Wus than dead, sir," returned the housekeeper ; "many times wus than dead ; Heaven forgive me for saying so. Sir Massingberd is Lost."

"Lost !" repeated I ; "how ? where ?"

"There is only One knows that, Master Peter ; but the Squire is not at the Hall, that's certain ; he never returned there last night, after he had gone his rounds in the preserves. He spoke with Bradford and two more of the keepers, and bade them keep a good look-out as usual ; but he did not come to the watchers in the Home Plantation. He never got so

near the house as that; nobody saw him since midnight. Gilmore put out his cigars and spirits as usual for him in his room; but they are untouched. The front door was not fastened on the inside; Sir Massingberd never came in."

Here I heard Mr. Long calling upon the stairs in a voice very different from his customary cheerful tones for Mrs. Myrtle.

"Mercy me, I wonder whether there's anything new!" cried she, rising with great alacrity. "As soon as I knows it, you shall know it, Master Peter;" with which generous promise she hurried from the room.

After this intelligence, shaving became an impossibility, and I hurried down as soon as I could into the breakfast-room. My tutor was standing at the window very thoughtful, and though he greeted me with his usual hilarity, it struck me that it was a little forced.

"Why, you are early this morning, Peter; and how profusely you have illustrated yourself with cuts; it is sad to see one so young with such a shaky hand. One would think you were one of the five-bottle-men, like Sir—like Lord Stowell."

He had been about to say "Sir Massingberd," I knew, and would on ordinary occasions not have hesitated to do so.

"De perditis nil nisi bonum?" quoth I inquiringly.

"Oh, so you have heard of this nine hours' wonder, have you?" returned my tutor. "Because our neighbour has chosen to leave home for a little, on some private business best known to himself, everybody will have it that he is *Lost*."

"But it does seem very extraordinary too," said I, "does it not? He has never done so before, has he?"

"Not in all the years he has lived in Fairburn," returned my tutor musingly.

"And he made no preparations, I suppose, for departure, did he? Took no clothes with him?"

"Nothing, nothing," interrupted Mr. Long, pacing the room to and fro, with his hand to his forehead. "But he had money, you know; he was eager to get that money yesterday."

"Then he would probably have hired a vehicle," urged I; "Sir Massingberd is not the man to use his own legs, beyond the limit, that is, of his own lands. You have heard him say that he would never be seen on the road without four horses."

Mr Long continued his walk without reply, but I thought I perceived that he was not unwilling to have the subject discussed. He seemed to be eager to take as light a view of the matter as possible, although like one who contends against his own more sombre convictions. I, on the contrary, had that leaning towards the gloomy and mysterious not uncommon with young persons, and both imagined the worst, and endeavoured to picture it.

"He went out after the poachers, did he not?" said I.

"Yes, as usual," replied my tutor; "he has done it before, scores of times."

"The pitcher goes often to the well, but is broken at last," returned I. "I should not be surprised if the wretched man has been murdered by some of those against whom he waged such unceasing war."

“Then if so, he must have been shot, Peter,” returned the rector hastily; “without firearms, it would have been hard to dispose of the gigantic baronet, armed as he doubtless was with his life-preserver. Now no gun has been heard to go off by any one, although it was thought that Sir Massingberd expected some raid to be made last night, by the gipsies or others; at all events, he seemed more alert than usual, Oliver tells me.”

The gipsies! My heart sank within me, as I thought of Rachel Liversedge consumed with the wrongs of her “little sister;” and of the young man, relative of that unhappy Carew whose life had been sworn away through the Squire’s machinations. I had seen nothing of them since my memorable interview, but it was like enough that the tribe were yet in the neighbourhood. True, they had waited so long for vengeance, that it was not probable they should have set about it at this time; but if Sir Massingberd had really come across them alone, while they were committing a depredation, violence might easily enough have ensued; and if violence, murder. I was very glad that Mrs. Myrtle came in at this juncture with the eggs and buttered toast, and concealed my embarrassment.

“No news, sir,” said she lugubriously, as she placed the delicacies upon the table. “The last words were, ‘Nothing has been heard of him.’” The housekeeper had established a system of communication by help of her kitchen-maid and the stable-lad at the Hall, whereby she received bulletins, every quarter of an hour or so, with respect to Sir Massingberd’s mysterious disappearance.

"Well, no news is good news, you know," responded Mr. Long gaily. "We should always look upon the bright side of things, Mrs. Myrtle."

"Yes, sir; but when a thing ain't got a bright side," remarked the housekeeper, shaking her head. "Why, it's dreadful now he's Lost; and it would be dreadful even if, after all, he was al——"

"Hush, hush, Mrs. Myrtle; you don't know but you may be speaking of a poor soul that is gone to his account. Sir Massingberd is doubtless a bad man; but let us not call it dreadful if he should be permitted to return among us and have some time yet, it may be, to repent in."

"Then you think he's dead and gone, do you, sir? Well, that's what I think; and that's what Patty thinks, too, and she's a very reasonable girl. 'Them ravens,' says she to me, 'didn't come to that church tower for nothing;' and though, of course, I told her to hold her tongue, and not talk folly like that, there was a good deal in what she said. Why, we have not had ravens here since Sir Wentworth came to his awful end in London. There was a mystery about that, too, wasn't there, sir? Lawk-a-mercy! Mr. Meredith, you gave me quite a turn."

I had only said "Look there!" and pointed to the window, through which Gilmore and the head-keeper were seen approaching the Rectory, and engaged in close conversation.

"I'll go with Patty and let them in," quoth Mrs. Myrtle, unconsciously betraying that she was unequal to opening the door alone in such an emergency. It is probable that, when it was opened, the incomers

and she had a great deal to talk about ; for they were not ushered into the breakfast-room for many minutes, and after the very moderate meal which sufficed us both upon the occasion had long been finished. The butler and Oliver Bradford were by no means good friends, and it must have been something portentous indeed which brought them to the Rectory together. It was, in fact, their very rivalry which had produced the double visit. Each conceived himself to be the superior minister of the absent potentate, and called upon by that position to act in his master's behalf ; and give notice to neighbouring powers, such as the parson, of the event that had paralyzed affairs at the Hall. It seemed only natural (as he himself subsequently expressed it) to Oliver Bradford, who had been servant, man, and boy to the Heath family for nearly sixty years, that he should be the spokesman on an occasion such as this ; and sleeking his scanty white hairs over his forehead with the palm of his hand, and passing the back of it across his mouth, he commenced as follows :—

“ Muster Long, I make bold to come over here, having been upon the property going on for three-score years and ten——”

“ As out-door servant,” interrupted Mr. Gilmore severely ; “ but not as confidential in any way. Mr. Long, this old man here insisted upon accompanying me in the performance of my duty, and I have humoured him.”

“ You’ve what ? ” cried the ancient keeper ; “ you’ve humoured *me*, you oily knave, have you ? No, no, you never did that to Oliver Bradford. It

wasn't worth your while. I come here about my master's business, as a matter of right. Are a few years of truckling and helping the devil's hand, and feathering your own nest pretty comfortably, to be weighed against a lifetime of honest service? Let Mr. Long here decide."

"Look here, men," quoth my tutor, "it is no use quarrelling about precedence. You are both in the same service, and owe the same duty to your master. I know what has happened in a general way, and require no long story from either of you. But you have doubtless each of you some information concerning this matter peculiar to your own positions, and I will ask you to communicate it in time. Twelve hours have not elapsed since your master's disappearance, a vry short time surely to set it down so decidedly to some fatal accident."

"He was as regular in his rounds as clockwork," interposed the old keeper, shaking his head. "He would never have left the Home Spinney unvisited last night, if life had been in him."

"And if he had meant to leave Fairburn of his own head," added the butler, "he would have come back for his brandy before he started; for all his hearty look Sir Massingberd could not get on long without that, and he would not have taken Grimjaw out with him neither."

"Oh, the dog was with him, was it?" said my tutor musing.

"It was not in the house, sir," replied Gilmore, "after Sir Massingberd had left. I went to make the fire in his sitting-room, and I noticed that the creature was neither on the hearthrug, nor under the

sofa, as is usually the case. I don't know when I have known the dog go out with him o' nights before. When I went to open the front door as usual this morning, there was Grimjaw, nigh frozen to death."

"Your master had made no sort of preparation, so far as you know, for his own departure anywhere?"

"None whatever. I set out his cigars for him, and I noticed that he had only put two in his case, a sure sign that he meant to return soon. He had no great coat, although it was bitter cold."

"Was he armed in any way?"

"No, sir; that is to say, he had his life-preserver, of course, but no gun or pistol."

"Had he any sum of money, or valuables of any kind about him, Gilmore?"

"I don't think that is at all likely," replied the butler grinning. "We haven't seen money at the Hall this many a day. As for valuables, Sir Massingberd had his big gold chain on, with a silver watch at the end of it, borrowed from me years ago, and my property."

It was remarkable how this ordinarily cautious and discreet person was changed in manner, as though he was well assured that he would never more have a master over him. Both Mr. Long and myself observed this.

"What time was your master usually accustomed to return home from his rounds in the preserves?"

"I did not sit up for him in general," returned Gilmore; "but when I have chanced to be awake, and to hear him come in, it was never later than three o'clock. His ordinary time was about half-

past twelve, but it depended on what time he started. He left the Hall last night at about ten, and should, therefore, have returned a little after midnight. I never set eyes on him since nine o'clock, when he was in his own sitting-room reading."

"And when did *you* see him last, Bradford?"

"When did I see Sir Massingberd Heath?" replied the old keeper, who had been chafing with impatience through his rival's evidence—"well, I see'd him last nine hours ago, at nearly twelve o'clock at night. I was on watch in the Old Plantation, and he came upon me sudden, as usual, with his long quick stride."

"Was there anything at all irregular about his manner or appearance; anything in the least degree different from what you always saw upon these occasions?"

"Nothing, whatever, sir. Look you, I knew my master well." [He had already begun to talk of him in the past tense!] "I could tell at a glance when he was put out more than usual, or when he had anything out of ordinary in hand; he never swore, saving your reverence's presence, what you may call *freely* then. He might have knocked one down, likely enough, if you gave him the least cross, but he was not flush of his oaths. Now I never heard him in a better fettle in that respect than he was last night. He cussed the lad Jem Meyrick, who had come up to me away from Davit's Copse for a light to his pipe; and he cussed me too, for giving it him, up hill and down dale, and in particular he cussed Grimjaw for being so old and slow that he couldn't keep up with him. Sir Massingberd never waited for

him, of course ; but after he'd been with us a few minutes, the old dog came up puffin' and wheezin' ; and when the Squire left us, it followed him as well as it could, but with the distance getting greater between them at every step. I watched them, for the moon made it almost as light as day, going straight for the Wolsey Oak, which was the direct way for the Home Spinney ; and that was where Sir Massingberd meant to go last night, although he never got there, or leastways the watcher never saw him."

"Have you any reason to believe, keeper, that there were poachers in any part of the preserves last night?"

"No, sir," replied Oliver, positively. "On the contrary, I knows there wasn't, although Sir Massingberd was as suspicious of them as usual, or more so. Why, with Jack Larrup and Dick Swivel both in jail, and all the Larchers sent out of the parish, and Squat and Burchall at sea, where was they to come from?"

"Sir Massingberd must have had many enemies?" mused my tutor.

"Ay, indeed, sir," replied old Oliver, pursing his lips ; "he held his own with the strong hand ; so strong, however, as no man would contend against him. If Sir Massingberd has been killed, Mr. Long, it was not in fair fight ; he was too much feared for that."

"There has been a gang of gipsies about the place this long time, has there not?" quoth my tutor.

"There has, sir ; but don't you think of gipsies and this here matter of Sir Massingberd as having anything to do with one another. They're feeble,

feckless bodies at the best. They ain't even good poachers, although my master always bid us beware of them. They would no more have ventured to meddle with the Squire, than a flock of linnets would attack a hawk, that's certain."

My tutor had been setting down on paper brief notes of his conversation with these two men; but he now put the writing away from him, and inquired what steps, in their judgment, ought to be taken in the matter, and when.

"You know your master better than I. If he chanced to come back this afternoon, or to-morrow, or next day, from any expedition he may have chosen to undertake, would he not be much annoyed at any hue and cry having been made after him?"

"That he just would," observed the keeper with emphasis.

"I would not have been the man to make the fuss," remarked the butler, sardonically, "for more money than he has paid me these ten years."

"In a word," observed my tutor, "you are both come here to shift the responsibility of a public search from your own shoulders to mine. Very good. I accept it. Let sufficient hands be procured at once, Bradford, to search the Chase and grounds, and drag the waters. And you, Gilmore, must accompany me, while I set seals on such rooms as may seem necessary up at the Hall."

The butler was for moving away on the instant with a "*Very well, sir,*" but Mr. Long added, "Please to wait in Mrs. Myrtle's parlour for me. We must go together."

"I don't like the look of that man Gilmore at

all, sir,' observed I, when the two had left the room.

"No, nor I, Peter," returned my tutor, sententiously, as he set about collecting tapes and sealing-wax; "I am afraid he is a rogue in grain."

Now, that was not by any means, or rather was very far short of, what I meant to imply; what I had had almost upon my burning lips was, "Don't you think he has murdered Sir Massingberd?" But the moment had gone by for putting the question, even if Mr. Long had not begun to whistle—a sure sign with him that he did not wish to speak upon the matter any further, just at present.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STONE GARDEN.

WHEN Mr. Long took his departure with Gilmore, he did not ask me to accompany him, and assist in an undertaking which was likely to be somewhat laborious. Perhaps he wished if the baronet did chance to return in a fury, that he alone should bear the brunt of it. Perhaps he thought there might be things at the Hall I had better not see, or perhaps he wished to observe the butler's behaviour at leisure. I think, however, he could scarcely have expected me to stay at home with my books, while such doings as he had directed were on the point of taking place. Euripides was doubtless in his day a sensation dramatist, but the atrocities of Medea could not enchain me, with so much dreadful mystery afoot in my immediate neighbourhood. Her departure through the air in a chariot drawn by winged dragons, was indeed a striking circumstance; but how much more wonderful was the disappearance of Sir Massingberd, who had departed no man knew how!

The news had spread like wildfire through the village. Numbers of country folk were hanging about the great gates of the avenue, drinking in the impromptu information of the lodge-keeper; but they did not venture to enter upon the forbidden ground. The universal belief among them was, I

found, that their puissant lord would soon reveal himself. Doubting Castle, it was true, was for the present without its master, but it was too much to expect that he would not return to it. The whole community resembled prisoners in that fortress, who, although temporarily relieved of the tyrant's presence, had little hope but that he was only gone forth upon a ramble, and would presently return with renewed zest for human flesh. The general consternation, however, was extreme, and such as would probably not have been excited by the sudden and unexplained removal of a far better man. The rumour had already got abroad that there was to be an immediate search in the park, and that Oliver Bradford had been empowered to select such persons as he thought fit to assist in the same. There were innumerable volunteers for this undertaking, principally on account of the excessive attraction of the work itself, which promised some ghastly revelation; and secondarily, for the mere sake of getting into Fairburn Chase at all—a demesne as totally unknown to the majority of those present as the Libyan Desert. The elders indeed remembered the time when a public footpath ran right through the Chase, “close by the Heronry, and away under the Wolsey Oak, and so through Davit’s Copse, into the high road to Crittenden,” said one, “whereby a mile and a half was wont to be saved.” “Ay, or two mile,” quoth another; “and Lawyer Moth always said as though the path was ours by right, until Sir Massingberd got his son made a king’s clerk in London, which shut his mouth up and the path at the same time.”

"Ay," said a third, mysteriously, "and it ain't too late to try the matter again, in case the property has got *into other hands*."

This remark brought back at once the immediate cause of their assembling together, and I began to be made the victim of cross-examination. To avoid being compelled to give my own opinion (which I had already begun to think a slander) upon the matter in hand, I took my leave as quietly as could be, and escaped, whither they dared not follow me, through the griffin-guarded gates. All within was, as usual, silent and deserted. A few leaves were still left to flutter down in eddies from the trees, or hop and rustle on the frosty ground, but their scarcity looked more mournful than utter bareness would have done. It was now the saddest time of all the year; the bleak east wind went wailing overhead; and underneath, the soil was black with frost. Instead of pursuing the avenue to the front door of the Hall, where, as it seemed, I was not wanted, I took a foot-track to the left, which I knew led to that bowling-green whither I had been previously invited by Sir Massingberd, although I had not taken advantage of his rare courtesy. If he did now appear, no matter in what state of mental irritation, he could scarcely quarrel with me for doing the very thing he had asked me to do. Had I known, however, the character of the place in which I found myself, I should have reserved my visit for a less eerie and mysterious occasion.

The time of year, it is true, had no unfavourable influence upon the scene that presented itself, for all was clothed in garments of thickest green. Vast

walls of yew shut in on every side a lawn of perfect smoothness ; everything proclaimed itself to belong to that portion of the Hall property which was "kept up" by subsidy from without. The quaint oak-seats, though old, were in good repair ; the yew hedges clipped to a marvel. Still nothing could exceed the sombre and funeral aspect of the spot. It seemed impossible that such a sober game as bowls could ever have been played there, or jest and laughter broken that awful stillness. The southern yew-screen was in a crescent form, at the ends of which were openings unseen from within the enclosed space. Passing through one of these, I came upon what was called the Stone Garden. It took its name from four stone terraces, from the highest of which I knew that there must be a very extensive view. This space was likewise covered with yew trees, clipped and cut in every conceivable form, after the vile taste of the seventeenth century. There was something weird in the aspect of those towering Kings and Queens—easily recognizable, however, for what they were intended—and of those maids of honour, with their gigantic ruffs and farthingales. One was almost tempted to imagine that they had been human once, and been turned into yew trees for their sins. The old area was black with them ; and a sense of positive oppression, notwithstanding the eager air which caught me sharply whenever I lost the shelter of one of these ungainly forms, led me on to the top terrace, where one could breathe freely, and have something else than yews to look upon.

Truly, from thence the scene was wide and fair. I stood at the extremity of the pleasure-grounds

most remote from the Hall, and with my back to it. Before me lay a solitary tract of wooded park, thickly interspersed with planted knolls and coppices. Immediately beneath me was the thicket called the Home Spinney, the favourite haunt of hare and pheasant, and the spot in all the Chase most cherished by Sir Massingberd. He would have resented a burglary, I do believe, with less of fury than any trespass upon that sacred ground. Beyond the Spinney, and standing by itself, far removed from any other tree, was the famous Wolsey Oak. Why called so, I have not the least idea, for it had the reputation of being a vast deal older than the days of the famous Cardinal. Many a summer had it seen—

“When the monk was fat,
And issuing shorn and sleek,
Would twist his girdle tight, and pat
The girls upon the cheek ;
Ere yet, in scorn of Peter’s Pence,
And number’d bead and shrift,
Bluff Harry broke into the spence,
And turned the cowls adrift.”

Yet still was it said to be as whole and sound as a bell. It was calculated to measure over fourteen yards in circumference, and that for many feet from its base; while its height, although it had lost some of its upper branches, still far exceeded that of any other of its compeers. Beyond this tree, but at another great interval, was the wood known as the Old Plantation, where Oliver Bradford had last seen his master alive. I was looking down, then, upon the very route which Sir Massingberd had been seen to commence, but which he had never ended. It was

to the Home Spinney he had been apparently bound, when something—none knew what—had changed his purpose. He would probably have passed through it, and come up by that winding path yonder to the spot where I now stood; it was the nearest way home for him. Perhaps he had done so, although it was unlikely, since the watcher had not seen him. Perhaps those very yews behind me had concealed his murderers. Shut in by those unechoing walls of living green, no cry for aid would have been heard, even if Sir Massingberd had been the man to call for it; he would most certainly have never asked for mercy. But hark! what was that sound that froze the current of my blood, and set my heart beating and fluttering like the wings of a prisoned bird against its cage? Was it a strangled cry for "Help!" repeated once, twice, thrice, or was it the wintry wind clanging and grinding the naked branches of the Spinney? A voice had terrified me in Fairburn Chase once before, which had turned out to be no mere fancy; but there was this horror about the present sound, that I seemed to dimly recognize it. It was the voice of Sir Massingberd Heath, with an awful change in it, as if a powerful hand were tightening upon his throat. It seemed, as I have said, to come from the direction of the copse beneath, and yet I determined to descend into it, rather than thread again the mazes of those melancholy yews. The idea of my assistance being really required never entered into my thoughts; what I wanted was to escape from this solitude, peopled only with unearthly cries, and regain the companionship of my fellow-creatures. How I regretted having left the

society of those honest folk outside the gates! To remain where I was, was impossible; I should have gone mad. Fortunately, the Spinney was well-nigh leafless, and a bright but wintry sun penetrated it completely. I fled over its withered and frosty leaves, looking neither to left nor right, till I leaped the deep ditch that formed its southern boundary, and found myself in the open; then I stopped indeed quite short, for, before me, not ten paces from the Spinney, from which he must have just emerged, lay the body of Grimjaw. It was still warm, but lifeless. There were no marks of violence about him; the struggle to extricate himself from the ditch, it is probable, had cost the wretched creature his little remaining vitality, weakened as he must have doubtless been by his previous night's lodging on the cold stone steps. But how had he come thither, who never moved anywhere out of doors, except with Sir Massingberd or Gilmore? and whither, led perhaps by some mysterious instinct, was he going when death had overtaken him—an easy task—and glazed that solitary eye, which had witnessed so much which was still a mystery to man?

Was it possible that he had perished in endeavouring to obey his master's cry for aid? that terrible "Help! help!" which rang in my ears a while ago, as I stood in the Stone Garden, and which rings, through half a century, in them now?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SEARCH.

SHRINKING away from the body of the unhappy Grimjaw, and fleeing from the solitary spot in which it lay, I ran down towards the Heronry, where, in the distance, I could now perceive a number of persons assembled upon the lake-side. Below and above it, the stream flowed on as usual; but the larger area of water, which contained the island, was frozen over with a thin coating of ice. This was being broken by men armed with long and heavy poles, after which the work of dragging the water was commenced. The scene was as desolate as the occupation was ghastly and depressing. Perched upon stony slabs of their now leafless home, the huge birds watched the proceedings with grave and serious air: at first, they imagined, I think, that the thing was done for their own behoof, and to the end that they might supply themselves with fish as usual; but the appearance of the grappling-irons disabused them of this idea. Now one, and now another, unable to restrain their curiosity, would rise slowly and warily into the air, and making a circuit over our heads, return to their old position to reflect, with head aside, upon what they had seen. The presence as spectators of these gigantic creatures, certainly increased the weird and awful character of the employ-

ment in which we were engaged, and struck quite a terror into the village folk, who were unaccustomed to see them in such close proximity. Still the work was not gone about by any means in reverent and solemn silence. If any man wishes his neighbours to speak their mind about him thoroughly and unreservedly, I should say, judging from what I heard on that occasion, Let him disappear, and be dragged for. It is not so certain he is dead, that any delicacy need be exercised in telling the severest truths about him; nor yet is there sufficient chance of his reappearance to make folks reticent through fear. Only when the drags halted a little, meeting with some hidden obstruction, all tongues were silent, and pale faces clustered about the toilers, expecting that the dreadful thing they sought was about to be brought to land.

"I thought we had him then," said one of the men, after an occasion of this sort; "but it was only a piece of stone."

"It might have been his *heart*, for all that," muttered another, cynically; and a murmur of "Ay, that's true," went round them all.

"Has anybody been about the Home Spinney this morning?" inquired I of Oliver Bradford, who had just given up his place at the ropes to a fresh man.

"No, sir, nor last night either, as it turns out. It will be bad for somebody if Sir Massingberd does return, and finds out that the watcher who ought to have been there was wiled away elsewhere by what he thought was poachers holloing to one another—some owl's cry, as I should judge. And to-day, I

doubt if a creature has been near the place, for none of my men seem to fancy going there alone."

"And who *was* the watcher there last night, Oliver?"

"Well, sir, we must not make mischief; he was a young chap new at the business, a sort of grand-nevvy of mine by the wife's side. He'll do better next time, will young Dick Westlock. He was over-eager, that's all. And when you hear a cry in these woods, unless you are thoroughly accustomed to them, it may lead you a pretty dance: it takes a practised ear to tell rightly where it comes from."

"You should know me better, Bradford," returned I, "than to suppose I would bring a lad to harm by mentioning such a matter; but I should like to ask him a question or two, if you will point him out."

"There he is then, sir," answered Oliver, pointing to a good-looking, honest lad enough, but one who perhaps would scarcely have been considered sufficiently old for so trustworthy a part as sentinel of the home preserves, had he not been grand-nephew to the head keeper.

"Why, Dick," said I, "your uncle tells me that you took an owl for a poacher last night, and followed his voice all over the Chase."

"It wasn't no owl, sir," quoth Dick, stoutly; "it were the voice of a man, whosoever it was."

"Don't thee be a fool!" exclaimed his uncle, roughly. "I tell thee it was a bird, and called like this;" and the keeper gave a very excellent imitation of the cry of an owl.

This was not greatly unlike the sound which had

so recently affrighted my own ears; but then owls rarely cry in the day-time.

"Dick," cried I, "never mind your uncle; listen to me. If you thought it was a human voice, what do you think it said?"

"Well, I can't rightly say as it said anything; it seemed to me to be a sort of wobbling in the throat; and I thought it might be a sound among some poaching fellars, made with a bird-call, or the like of that."

"Supposing it said any word at all, Dick, what word was it most like?"

Mr. Richard Westlock looked as nonplussed and embarrassed as though I had propounded to him some extremely complicated riddle.

"Was it anything like 'Hel—p, hel—p'?" said I, imitating as well as I could those terrible tones.

"Bless my body," quoth Mr. Richard, slapping his legs with his hands, in admiration of my sagacity, "if them ain't the very words as it *did* say!"

"What think you of that, Oliver Bradford?" inquired I, gravely.

"As the bell tinks, so the fool thinks," responded the head keeper, sententiously. "If you had asked Dick whether the word wasn't 'Jerusalem,' he would have said, 'Ay, that was the very word.'"

"Still," urged I, "since there may be something more than fancy in the thing, and the voice, if it was one, could not have come from under water, let the Park woods be thoroughly searched at once. There are men enough outside the gates to do that, without suspending the work that is going on here; and why should we lose time?"

The head keeper sulkily muttered something about not wanting a caddel of people poking their noses into every part of Fairburn Chase; then with earnest distinctness, as though the thought had only just struck him, "Besides, Mr. Meredith, let me tell you that they may get to know more than is good for them."

At these words, I cast an involuntary glance at the plantation within a few hundred feet of us, in the recesses of which dwelt Sinnamenta, Lady Heath.

"*You* may know, sir," continued the keeper, translating my thought, "but everybody don't know, and it's much better that they shouldn't."

Certainly the objection was a grave one, and I was glad enough to perceive Mr. Long coming down from the Hall towards us—an authority by whom the question could be decided.

"You had better ask him yourself, Oliver," said I; for as my tutor had never spoken to me of the existence of the unfortunate maniac, I did not like to address him upon the subject. Bradford therefore went forward to meet him; and after they had had some talk together, Mr. Long beckoned me to him.

"I think with you, Peter," said he, "that in any case, we should lose no time in searching the Chase. If we do not discover what we seek, we can scarcely fail to find some trace of a struggle, if struggle there has been, between such a man as Sir Massingberd and whoever may have assailed him. If he has been murdered, it is, of course, just possible that the assassins threw the body into the water, although not here, since the ice would scarcely have formed over it like this; otherwise, they could not have removed it

without leaving some visible trace. Do you, Bradford, and a couple of your own men, examine that plantation yonder thoroughly, so that it need not be searched again; and in the meantime I will go and fetch more help."

I have taken part, in my time, in many a "quest" for game, both large and little; I have sought on foot in the rock-crannies of the north for the hill-fox; I have penetrated the tangled jungles of Hindustan for tiger; I have stood alone, gun in hand, on the skirts of a tropical forest, not knowing what bird or beast the beaters within might chance at any moment to drive forth; but I have never experienced such excitement as that which I felt when, one of forty men, I walked from end to end of Fairburn Chase in search of its lost master.

In one long line, and at the distance of about twenty yards from one another, we plodded on slowly and steadily, and with eyes that left no bush unexamined. This work, which in summer would have been toil indeed, was rendered comparatively easy by the bareness of the season; the frost, too, made the swamps in the hollows safe to the tread, and the tangled underwood brittle before us. Many a sunken spot we found hidden in brake and brier, and scarcely known to the keepers themselves, such as might easily have held, and we could not but think how fitly, the Thing we feared to find; and sometimes, when one man called to his neighbours, the whole line would halt, and each could scarcely restrain himself from running in, and seeing with his own eyes what trace of the missing man it was which had provoked the exclamation. We began at the outskirts

of the Park, and worked towards the Hall, so that the Home Spinney, which was the likeliest spot of all, since he had been last seen going in that direction, was reserved for the end. As the men approached it, the excitement increased; they almost ran over the large open space in which stood the Wolsey Oak, extending its gnarled and naked arms aloft, as if in horror; but when they searched the coppice itself, and found the body of Grimjaw, stiffened into stone since I last saw it, many of them were not so eager to push on. I had omitted to tell them of the wretched animal's death, and the effect of the sight upon them was really considerable.

That "the hand of little employment hath the daintier sense," is in nothing more true than in the emotion produced by the sufferings or decease of animals upon gentle folks and upon labouring persons. Greater familiarity with such spectacles, and, perhaps, too, a larger experience of hardship and sorrow among his own fellow-creatures—which naturally tends to weaken his sense of pity for mere animals—prevents the peasant from being moved at all by some sights at which his superiors would be really shocked: a dead horse lying in the road is, to the stonebreaker, a dead horse, and nothing more; whereas, to him who goes by on wheels, unless he is a veterinary surgeon, the sight is positively distressing. I am sure that the spectacle of half-a-dozen ordinary dead dogs would not have affected Oliver Bradford, for instance, in the least, while if they had been "lurchers," and given to poaching practices, such a funeral scene would have afforded him unmixed satisfaction. But when he saw Grimjaw lying

dead, and frozen, he shook his head very gravely, and bade us mark his words, "That that ere dog didn't die for nothing, but for a sign; that he would never have died, not he, if his master and constant companion had still had breath in him; and more than that, we should find, we might take his word for it, that that there body, and that of Sir Massingberd Heath, were not very far from one another."

There were murmurs of hushed and awe-struck adhesion to these remarks, but not a dissentient voice in all the company; and in a frame of mind which would now undoubtedly be called "sensational," and not in a broken line of march, as heretofore, but almost shoulder to shoulder, we entered the Home Spinney.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT WAS IN THE COVERED CART.

IF this true narrative of mine should chance to find its channel of publication in a hebdomadal periodical and the end of the last chapter coincide with the end of the week, I am afraid I shall have unduly aroused the expectation of my readers, and kept them upon tenter-hooks during that period upon false pretences or rather what may seem to be so. They will doubtless have promised themselves some ghastly spectacle (and I give them my honour that if they will only have patience they shall have it) to be presented in the very next page or two. It may disappoint them temporarily, to hear that though we searched the coppice, tree by tree, and left not one heap of leaves unstirred by our feet, that we found nothing, nothing. And yet I will venture to say, that if we had come upon that sight which all were so prepared for, the stiffened limbs of murdered Sir Massingberd, with his cruel face set for ever in death, and his hard eyes scowling up at the sky, it would scarcely have filled us with greater awe. It would have been a terrible sight, doubtless, but with every minute the terror would have faded, until at last it might have even melted into pity. He could at least have hurt no man more, being dead. But now that he was only Lost—still Lost—we looked at one another with

dumb surprise, and over our own shoulders with misgivings. He was not above ground in all Fairburn Chase, that was certain; nor under water, for the dragging-parties had discovered no more than we. Any idea of suicide was quite out of the question; Sir Massingberd Heath was the last man to leave life before he was summoned, even if he really felt, as he averred, that there was no sort of risk in doing so. Wicked men have a tolerably high opinion of this world, notwithstanding their low views of the people that inhabit it; and the French philosopher who put an end to his not invaluable existence upon the ground that he had had enough of everything, was an exceptional case.

At the same time, the probabilities were immensely against the baronet's having voluntarily undertaken any expedition, considering the circumstances under which he must have set out—on foot, fatigued, and at so late an hour. If secrecy had been his object, it would have been far more easily secured by his departure at a less extraordinary time. In the meanwhile, day after day passed by without any tidings, and the mystery of his disappearance deepened and spread. Mr. Long was rather reserved upon the matter at first, professing to entertain little doubt that the wilful Squire would presently return, malicious and grim as ever; but as time went on, he began to grow uneasy, and seemed to find relief in conversing upon the subject, and suggesting more or less impossible contingencies.

“Do you remember, Peter,” said he one morning at breakfast-time, “reading out to me, some months ago, an account of the murder of a certain lieutenant

of the coast-guard by smugglers on the east coast; how he oppressed them and treated them with unnecessary cruelty for many, many months, until at last they took him away out of his bed by force, and carried him no man knew whither, and put him to death with tortures?"

"Yes," returned I, "perfectly well. They buried the poor wretch up to his neck in the sea-sand, and bowled stones at his head."

"Well, Peter, that frightful scene is constantly representing itself whenever I shut my eyes; only the head is that of Sir Massingberd. You cannot imagine how distressing it is to me now to go to bed, with the expectation of this re-enacting itself before I can get to sleep."

"Dear me, how dreadful!" returned I. "But does not the fact of your only recognizing the victim, convince you of the unreality of the thing? If you knew the faces of the smugglers, then indeed——"

"I do know them, Peter," interrupted my tutor gravely; "that is the worst of it; although it should, as you say, rather convince me of the imaginary character of the scene, since the actors in it have long been dead and gone, I believe. They are not smugglers, but gipsies. There is one Carew in particular, one unhappy man, into whose history I need not enter, but who once incurred the baronet's vengeance, and I am afraid it is but too likely perished in consequence. It is a sad story of deception on both sides; but it is certain that Sir Massingberd richly earned the hatred of the wandering people. I have no right, of course, to make any such charge, but, Peter, I cannot help thinking that it is they who have made

away with the Squire. I casually inquired in the village yesterday about the tribe that generally inhabit the fir-grove on the Crittenden Road, and it seems they left the place by night, on or about the very date of Sir Massingberd's disappearance."

My heart grew cold and heavy as a stone at these words, delivered though they were with vagueness, and without any threat of action to follow them, for the suspicion which my tutor now suggested had long ago taken firm root in my own mind. I would not, however, have given expression to it upon any account, and my present wish was to do away with this notion of the rector's as much as possible. I would not, perhaps, have assisted in the escape of the Cingari from punishment, if punishment they deserved, but neither would I have put out my hand to deliver them up. The law had taken its wicked will of them often enough already, and in connexion with this very man.

"Those who know these people best," said I, "such as Bradford and the keepers, do not think it at all probable that they would have had the courage to face Sir Massingberd. Even if they possessed it, what could they have done but have slain him? and if slain, where have they put him to?"

"God alone knows," said my tutor, solemnly; "but the man at the pike at Crittenden says, I believe, that they had a covered cart with them, which they have never been known to have before."

I murmured something to the effect that the winter was coming on, and that it was likely enough that they should have procured for themselves some peripatetic shelter of that kind; but a nameless

horror took hold upon me, in spite of myself, when Mr. Long rejoined, that he should think it his duty to have the gipsies followed, and a thorough examination of their effects to be made. I had not another word to say. I seemed already to see poor old Rachel Liversedge standing in the felon's dock, avowing and glorying in her guilt, and defiant of the sentence which would consign her and hers to the same fate that had overtaken, with no such justice, Stanley Carew. Any hope of escape for them, I knew, was out of the question. They had not the means for speedy travel, while, in those days of superstition and intolerance, the Cingari were an object of animadversion and alarm, whithersoever they moved. That very day—acting upon information received concerning their present whereabouts—Mr. Long set out on horseback, accompanied by the parish constable, and came up with the party whom he sought upon a certain common within twenty miles of Fairburn. The tribe, of whom I had only seen three grown-up members, were tolerably numerous, and the constable evinced his fitness for being a peace-officer by counselling the rector to do nothing rash, at least until reinforcements should permit of his doing so with safety. The sight, however, of the covered cart, placed, as it seemed, jealously in the very centre of the encampment, was too much for Mr. Long, who, to do him justice, was as bold as a lion, except where conventional “position,” as in the case of Sir Massingberd, made him indisposed for action. He turned his horse straight for the desired object, in spite of the threatening looks of several men, who were tinkering about an immense fire, and was only stopped

by the youngest of them starting up, and laying his hand imperatively upon his bridle-rein.

"Have you a warrant, Mr. Long," inquired the gipsy, sternly, "that you ride through our camp, when all the rest of the common is open to you, and wish to pry into that poor place yonder, which is all we have of house and home?"

The rector had no sort of right for what he did, and was therefore proportionally indignant.

"Unhand my bridle, sirrah!" cried he. "What is your name who seem to know mine so well, and yet who knows me so little, that you can imagine I am here in any other cause than that of Right and Justice?"

"My name is Walter Carew," replied the gipsy, still retaining his hold.

"Then that is warrant sufficient for what I do," cried my tutor, excitedly, and raising his riding-whip as he spoke.

The swarthy face of the gipsy gleamed with passion, and his unoccupied right hand sought his side, as if for a weapon. Mischief would undoubtedly have ensued, but that at that moment the curtains of the covered cart were parted by a skinny hand, and the voice of Rachel Liversedge was heard bidding the young man let the bridle go, and not spill parson's blood, which was as bad as wasting milk and water. Then she added, with mock courtesy: "Pray, come hither, Mr. Long; our doors are always open, and there can be no intrusion where there are only females and sickness."

"If that be all," returned my tutor, in a softened tone, for though somewhat arbitrary, as it would now

be thought, towards his inferiors, he was ever gentle to the sex; "if that indeed be all, I shall not inflict my presence upon you long."¹

With those words, he threw himself from his horse, and climbed up into the cart; it was rather a roomy one, but all that was in it was clearly to be seen at the first glance. It was carpeted with rushes a foot thick, from which Rachel Liversedge was busily engaged in weaving chair-bottoms. Opposite to her sat another female, engaged with the same articles, but constructing out of them crowns and necklaces, which, though they did not very much resemble the ornaments for which they were intended, appeared to afford her exquisite satisfaction.

"Why don't you introduce me, Rachel?" exclaimed she, testily, as Mr Long looked in. "Don't you see the gentleman is bowing? Sinnamenta — Lady Heath." The secret of the gipsies' sudden removal, as well as of their use of the vehicle which had excited his suspicions, was at once apparent to the rector.

"Is she better, happier in your custody?" inquired my tutor, in a whisper, of the chair-maker. "God knows I would not disturb her if she be."

"My little sister is not beaten now," observed Rachel, bitterly; "although, of course, we have not those luxuries with which her husband has always surrounded her."

"Only four times, Sister Rachel!" observed the afflicted one, in a tone of remonstrance; "one, two,

¹ In those days, it was not thought incumbent upon ministers of the Gospel to look after gipsy-folk, whose souls, in case they had any, were not opined to be much worth saving.

three, four;" checking them off on her poor fingers, covered with worthless gewgaws. "I don't consider Gilmore's beatings anything, only Sir Massingberd's."

"May God's curse have found him!" exclaimed Rachel Liversedge, fervently; "may He have avenged her wrongs upon him at last! Don't look at me, sir, as though I were a witch wishing a good man ill. I wish I *were* a witch. How he should pine, and rave, and writhe, and suffer ten thousand deaths in one!"

She spoke with such hate and fury, that Mr. Long involuntarily cast once more a suspicious glance around him, as though in reality she possessed the means of vengeance which she so ardently desired. "Did you expect to find him here?" continued she. "That was it, was it? I wish you had. I would that I had his fleshless bones to show you. It is not *my* fault that I have them not, be sure. If there were any manliness left among my people—but there is not; they are curs all—if any memory of the persecuted and the murdered had dwelt within them, as with me, let alone this work of his," she pointed to her unconscious sister, "for which, had he done nought else, I would have torn his heart out;—he would not have lived thus long by forty years. For aught we know, however, he lives yet; only hearing he was gone, we went and took my little sister from her wretchedness, and thus will keep her if you give us leave, you Christian gentlemen. Where he may be, we know not; we only hope that in some hateful spot—in hell, if such a place there be—he may be suffering unimagined pains."

The fervour and energy of her words, however reprehensible in a moral point of view, were such as left no doubt in the mind of Mr. Long that the gipsy woman spoke truth. Assuring her, therefore, that so far as he was concerned, she should not be molested in the custody of her unfortunate sister, my tutor rode back to Fairburn, relieved from the dread burden of his late suspicion, but more at his wit's end for an elucidation of the disappearance of Sir Massingberd than ever. Right glad was I to hear that his errand among my dusky friends had been bootless; but by the next morning's post I had received bitter news from Harley Street. A copy of that menacing epistle which I had so unwittingly enclosed to Marmaduke from his uncle, reached me from Mr. Gerard. His words were kind, and intended to be comforting. He knew, of course, that I had been deceived; he well knew, and they all knew, he said, that my hand was the last to do Marmaduke hurt, to do aught but protect and uphold him. But I could see that some grievous harm had occurred, nevertheless, through me, as Sir Massingberd's catspaw. It was more apparent to me because there was not one accompanying word from my dear friend himself, whom I knew too well to imagine capable of blaming me. It was most apparent of all, because of the postscript written in Lucy's own hand—so fair, so clear, so brave, so like her own sweet self, saying that I must not reproach myself because I had been overreached by a base man. "Marmaduke will write soon," she said; "he does not love you less because he is silent upon this matter, and must be kept so for a little while." He was ill, then, thanks to my dull wits; and out of

pity she had written "Marmaduke." Ah me, would *I* not have been ill! Would *I* not have welcomed kinship with a score of wicked uncles for such pity! "He does not love you less because he is silent;" was that a quotation culled from her own heart's whisperings?

"A most unfortunate business," said Mr. Long, reflectively, when he had possessed himself of this intelligence. "That letter of Sir Massingberd's will undo all the good of the last twelve months. With what a devilish ingenuity for torment has he framed every phrase. '*My arm will reach you wheresoever you are; at the time you least expect it, and from the quarter to which you have least looked. However Well it may seem to be with you, it will not be Well.*' How thoroughly he knew his nephew! This will make Marmaduke Heath a wretched man for life."

"Not if Sir Massingberd be dead," said I, "and can be proved to be so."

"That is true," responded my tutor, drily; then added, without, I think, intending me to hear it, "But what will be worse than anything, is this doubt as to whether he be dead or not."

"I felt convinced of this too, and bowed my head in sorrow and silence. There was a long pause. Then my tutor suddenly started up, and exclaimed, with animation, "Peter, will you go with me to London? I certainly shall be doing more good there, just now, than here; and I think that your presence will be welcome, nay, needful, in Harley Street."

"I shall be ready to start this very evening,"

returned I, thinking of the mail which passed at night.

“We will be off within an hour,” replied my tutor; “I will order posterns from the inn at once. Too much time has been lost already; we should have started when Sir Massingberd himself did.”

“Do you think he is gone to town, then, with any evil purpose?” inquired I, aghast.

“If he has gone at all, it is certain it is for no good,” rejoined the rector, gravely. “It is more than likely that this disappearance may be nothing but a ruse to throw us off our guard. The cat that despaired of attaining her end by other means, pretended to be dead.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROCESSION.

AT the time of which I write, a dweller in the midlands who wanted to go to town, did not drive down to the nearest railway station, to be transported from thence by the fiery dragon to his destination. Railways had been long heard of, and indeed there was one within twenty miles of Fairburn, which we should now call a tramway only, for engine it had none. Locomotives were the subject of debate in scientific circles, and of scorn among the rest of the community. A journey such as that my tutor and myself were about to undertake, is scarcely to be understood by readers of the present generation. Not only did it consume an amount of time which would now suffice for six times the distance, but it was surrounded by difficulties and dangers that have now no existence whatever—"extinct Satans," as a writer calls them, who is now scarcely held to be "modern," but who at that time had never written a line. The coach for which Mr. Long had thought it advisable not to wait, had met in its time with a thousand-and-one strange casualties, and the guard was a very Scheherazadè at relating them. The "Highflyer" had come to dreadful grief in racing with an empty stomach, but many "outsides," against its rival, the "Rapid," which traversed a portion of the same road. It had often to

open both its doors, to let the water through, in crossing Crittenden Ford, by neglect of which precaution upon one occasion, four "insides" had the misfortune to be suffocated. It had been dug out of snow-drifts a hundred times, and now and then it had *not* been dug out, and the passengers had been frost-bitten. In winter it was usual enough for them to spend a day or two perforce at some country inn, because the roads were "not open." The "Highflyer" had once been attacked by a tiger (out of a travelling caravan), which killed the off-leader; but this was an exceptional adventure. It was attacked by highwaymen at least once a year, but in this respect was considered rather a fortunate coach. Only a few weeks previously, there had been found by the reapers, in one of Farmer Arabel's wheat-fields, mail-bags with letters containing many thousand pounds in drafts and bills, which had been taken by gentlemen of the road from the custody of the guard of the "Highflyer" in the early summer. These persons had gone into the standing wheat to divide their booty, and left there what was to them unvaluable property, or too difficult to negotiate.

In the two trips I had already taken to the metropolis, I had gone by this curious conveyance, of which all Fairburn had something to say; but I was now to journey even more gloriously still. So thoroughly had Mr. Long got to be convinced that some immediate danger was imminent to Marmaduke at the hands of his uncle, that he could not bear the least unnecessary delay in giving him warning. We posted with four horses, and generally at full gallop. I agree with the Great Lexicographer in thinking that

sensation very pleasurable indeed. The express train, it is true, goes five times as fast; but you do not feel that there is any credit due to the steam-horse for that. You take it as a matter of course, and would do so, no matter what exertions it should make for you, short of bursting. But when you heard the ring of the sixteen hoofs upon the iron road, and the sharp crack of the whips in the frosty air, or leaned out of the window for a moment and beheld the good steeds smoking in your behalf, you said to yourself or to your companion, if you had one, "This is wonderful fine travelling." Perhaps you contrasted such great speed with that attained by the Exeter flying coaches in your ancestors' time, and smiled with contemptuous pity at their five miles an hour, stoppages excluded.

The trees and hedges flew by you then, and gave an idea of the velocity, such as the telegraph posts, seen vanishing thin out of the window of a railway carriage, fail to convey; while, when you stopped for new cattle, the hurry and bustle attendant on the order, "Horses on," helped to strengthen the belief in your own fast travelling. Still, after the first few hours, even the enjoyments of a post-chaise and four begin to pall; and long before we had approached our destination I was cramped, and chilled, and tired enough. It was growing dark, too; so that there was little to be seen without, and we had passed those dangerous parts of the road where expectations of possible highwaymen had afforded me some excitement. I was dozing dreamily, unconscious that the light of London was flaring like a dusky dawn in front of us, and that we had even already entered its

then limits upon the north-east, when I was roughly roused by the sudden stoppage of the carriage, accompanied by wild cries, and a glare of lurid flame. Mr. Long had put down the window, and was leaning out of it. There was a dense fog, and gas had not yet been established in that part of London; but a vast assemblage of people were streaming slowly past us, and many of them had torches in their hands. They took no notice of us whatever, but yelled and shouted, and every now and then cast glances behind them at some approaching spectacle, which seemed to be about to overtake us. Presently we beheld this ourselves. First came a great number of constables, marching twenty abreast, and clearing all before them with large staves; then a body of the mounted patrol—a corps then but newly formed, and which, although now well-nigh extinct, was destined in its time to do good service; then more constables, then a vast quantity of horsemen, armed and unarmed, and lastly this:—Extended on an inclined platform, built to a considerable height upon an open cart, was the body of a dead man. It was attired in blue trousers, and with a white and blue striped waistcoat, but without a coat. On the left side of him was a huge mallet, and on the right a ripping chisel.

“Great Heaven! what is this?” inquired Mr. Long of one of the mounted constables.

“Oh, it’s him, sir, sure enough; we’ve got him at last,” returned the officer.

“Him? Who?” cried I, half stupefied with fatigue and horror. “Have they found Sir Massingberd?”

No, it was not Sir Massingberd. The face which was now being slowly carried past us was wicked and stern enough, but it was not *his* face. The skin was black, the eyes were projecting; it was plain that the poor wretch had been strangled. The excitement of those who caught sight of it was hideous to witness. They cursed and hissed in hate and fury, and battled to get near the cart, that they might spit upon the corpse which it contained. The force of the advancing crowd was so tremendous, that we were compelled to move for some distance side by side with this appalling sight, and presently immediately behind it; there we seemed to fall in as a part of the procession, and were no doubt considered by the majority of persons to officially belong to it. We were borne southwards quite out of our proper direction, and were unable to prevent it; for it was as much as the postillions could do to sit their horses, and avoid being shouldered out of their saddles. Our progress was of course at a foot's-pace only, and twice the procession halted, once opposite a draper's, and once opposite a public-house, when the yells and hooting of the crowd were terrible to hear. Not only were these two houses closely shuttered up (as they well might be), but the shop fronts everywhere were closed, and the windows and the tops of the houses crowded with spectators. By this time, we had got to know in what dreadful proceedings we were thus taking an involuntary part. The body in the cart was that of the murderer Williams, who had committed suicide two days before, to escape, it was thought, not so much the scaffold, as the execrations of his fellow-creatures. All London was filled with

hate of him, as before his capture it had been filled with fear; and the government had caused this public exhibition of his corpse, to convince the minds of the public that the wholesale assassin was really no longer alive. The houses at which we had halted were those which had once been inhabited by his unhappy victims, the Marrs and the Williamsons. Subsequently the corpse was conveyed to St. George's turnpike, and there interred with a stake thrust through the middle of it; but before that frightful ceremony took place the postillions had managed to extricate us, and we had driven westward to our destination. Still, I for my part had seen enough, and more than enough, to make that entry of ours into London a thing impossible to forget; and I think it rendered, by association, the mystery concerning which we had come up to Harley Street, more menacing and sombre than before.

CHAPTER XXV.

AMONG FRIENDS.

WE found Marmaduke Heath in a less morbid state of mind than we had expected. The die having been cast—the time given him by Sir Massingberd for his return and so-called reconciliation with that worthy having already elapsed without any action on the part of his uncle, the effect of that “Captain Swing”-like epistle was slowly wearing off. No one ever revived the matter in his presence, nor, as we have seen, was he permitted even to write upon the subject. Still, he knew that I had been lately communicated with concerning it—for at first the blow had fallen on its object with such force and fulness that those about him had really not liked to let me know the extent of the mischief I might have committed—and he imagined that I had now come up in mere friendly sorrow to cheer and comfort him. As he came out into the dark street on that December evening to give me loving welcome, fresh from that awful procession scene, I positively looked with terror to left and right, lest some cloaked figure, whom yet we both should recognize, might reach forth an iron arm and tear him away. It was I who was morbid and unstrung, and not my friend; he strove, I knew, to appear to the best advantage, in good humour and

high spirits, in order that I might have less to reproach myself with.

"My dear old Peter," cried he, laughing, "how glad I am to see your honest face! Have you brought me any verbal message from my charming uncle, or are you only his deputy-postman? *How* is he—*how* is he?"

I could see, in spite of his light way, that he was curious to have this interrogation answered; but what was I to say? "I don't know whether he's well or ill," returned I, carelessly, as I stepped into the hall. "But how is Mr. Gerard and Miss——"

"Here is 'Miss,'" returned a sweet voice, blithe as a bird's; "she is excellently well, Peter, thank you. But what a white face *you* have got! If that is the gift of country air, there is certainly no such cause for regretting our absence from the Devoncot, about which Marmaduke is always so solicitous."

"'Marmaduke' to his face, now!" thought I. I could not prevent my heart from sinking a little, in spite of the life-buoy of friendship. But I answered gallantly, "There is no air that can wither *your* roses, Miss Lucy, for the summer is never over where you are."

"Bravo, Peter," quoth Mr. Gerard, set in the warm glow of the dining-room, which gleamed forth from the open door behind him. "If he is so complimentary in a thorough draught, what a mirror of courtesy will he be when he gets thawed! Come in, my dear Mr. Long; come in to the warm. No east wind ever brought people more good, than this which brings you two to us. Lucy—— Ah, that's right; she has gone to order the dinner to be rechaufféd.

Now, do you travellers answer no man one word, but go make yourselves comfortable—you have your old rooms, of course—and then come down at once to food and fire. Marmaduke, my dear boy, you keep me company here, please; otherwise, you will delay Peter with your gossip, I know.”

That was a sentence with a purpose in it. If, as Mr. Gerard at once guessed, we had come up to town on business connected with Sir Massingberd, it might be advisable that I should not be interrogated by Marmaduke privately. For my part I was greatly relieved by it, since I had no desire to be the person to communicate bad tidings—for such I knew he would consider them—to my friend a second time. My spirits had risen somewhat with the warmth of our reception; it is not a little to have honest friends, and welcome unmistakable in hand and voice and eye. There is many a man who goes smoothly through the world by help of these alone, and only at times sighs for the love that but one could have given him, and which has been bestowed by her elsewhere. When I got down into the dining-room, a minute or two before my tutor, I was received by quite a chorus of kind voices—a very tumult of hospitable greeting.

“Warm your toes, Peter—warm your toes; you shall have a glass of sherry worth drinking directly,” cried Mr. Gerard, all in a breath.

“Yes, Peter, you and I will have a glass together,” exclaimed Marmaduke, eagerly.

“Stop for ‘the particular’—stop for the green seal: it will be here in a minute,” entreated the host.

“No, no,” returned Marmaduke; “I must drink

his health at once. Cowslip wine, if I drank it with Peter, would be better to me than Johannis-berg."

He had his hand upon her arm, as I entered the room; I was sure of that, although she had gently but swiftly withdrawn it from his touch as the door opened. How happy she looked; how passing fair with that faint flush! How handsome and bright-faced was dear Marmaduke! How placidly content, like one who draws his happiness from that of others, was the countenance of Harvey Gerard! A picture of domestic pleasure and content indeed, and with three noble figures in it. It was impossible to doubt that two lovers stood before me, and a father who had found a prospective son-in-law, whom he could love as a son. This new relationship had been only established within a very few days, and upon that account, perhaps, it was the more patent. My mischance in the matter of Sir Massingberd's letter had been the immediate cause of Marmaduke's declaration. She had compassionated him in his troubles, and he had told her in what alone his hope of comfort lay. He had not been sanguine of securing her—who could have been, with such a priceless prize in view?—for not only had he a diffidence in his own powers of pleasing, great and winning as they were, beyond those of any man I ever knew, but he feared to find an obstacle to his wishes in her father.

"Dear Mr. Gerard," he had said, with his usual frankness, "I have won your daughter's heart, and love her better than all the world. Still, it is you alone who have her hand to dispose of. She loves and respects you as never yet was father loved and respected, and this only makes her dearer to me. I

feel as much bound in this matter by your decision— Oh, sir, God grant your heart may turn towards me—as she does herself. I dare not tell you what I think of you to your face. The very greatness of my respect for you makes me fear your rejection of *me*. I am, in one respect at least, a weak and morbid man, while your mind is vigorous and strong upon all points. You are in armour of proof from head to heel; whereas, there is a joint in my harness open to every blow. I am afraid, sir, that you despise me.”

“I do not despise you, Marmaduke,” Mr. Gerard had replied, in his kind, grave voice.

“Ah, sir, I know what you would say,” returned the young man, with vehemence; “you pity me, and pity and contempt are twin-sisters. Besides, I am a Heath; you do not wish that blood of yours should mix with that of an evil and accursed race; and, moreover—though that, with a man like you, has, I know, but little weight—I may live and die a pauper.”

“My dear Marmaduke,” Mr. Gerard had answered, “I cannot conceal from you that there are grave objections to your marriage with my daughter, and more especially at present. We need not revert to the last matter you have spoken of, for wealth is not what I should seek for in my son-in-law; even if it were, your alliance would reasonably promise it, and might be sought by many on that account. As for your being a Heath, that you cannot help; and, with respect to ‘blood,’ there is more rubbish spoken upon that subject by otherwise sensible folk than upon all others put together. Bad example and evil training

are sufficient to account for the bad courses of any family without impeaching their circulating fluids. If your uncle had not happened to be likewise your guardian, in you, my dear young friend, I frankly tell you, I should see no fault, or rather no misfortune; but, since he has unhappily had the opportunity of weakening and intimidating——”

“Sir, sir, pray spare me,” broke in Marmaduke, passionately; “are you going to say that I am a coward?”

“Heaven forbid, my boy,” replied Mr. Gerard, earnestly; “you are as brave as I am, I do not doubt. If I thought you to be what you suggest, I would not parley with you about my darling daughter for one moment. I would say ‘No’ at once. My Lucy wooed by a poltroon!—no, that is not possible. I do not say ‘No’ to *you*, Marmaduke.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, sir,” exclaimed the young man with emotion; then added solemnly, “and I thank God.”

“What I do say, however,” returned Mr. Gerard, “is ‘Wait.’ While your uncle lives, I cannot, under existing circumstances, permit you to be my Lucy’s husband. At present, you are only boy and girl, and can well afford to be patient.”

“And when we do marry,” returned Marmaduke, gratefully, “you shall not lose your daughter, sir, but rather gain a son. My home, if I ever have one, shall be yours also. Pray, believe me when I say that you are my second father, for you have given me a new life.

It really seemed so to him who looked at the sparkling eyes and heightened colour of the speaker, and listened to his tones, so rich with hope and love.

"There is certainly no one so civil as a would-be son-in-law," replied Mr. Gerard, good-naturedly. "I wonder that old gentlemen in my position ever permit them to marry at all."

And thus it had been settled—as I saw that it had been—only a very little while before our arrival in Harley Street.

"And what brings you good people up to town?" asked Mr. Gerard, gaily, "without sending a line in advance, which, even in mercy to the housekeeper, you would surely have done, had not the business been urgent? As to your travelling with four horses," added our host, slyly, "I know so well the pride and ostentation of the clergy, that I am not the least astonished at your doing *that*, Mr. Rector."

"Truly, sir, now that I find all safe and well," replied my tutor, "I begin to think we might have travelled in a less magnificent way; but the fact is, that I felt foolishly apprehensive, and curious to tell you our tidings. Sir Massingberd Heath has been Lost since Thursday fortnight, November sixteenth."

"Lost!" exclaimed Mr. Gerard, in amazement.

"Lost!" echoed Lucy, compassionately.

"Lost!" murmured Marmaduke, turning deadly pale. "That is terrible, indeed."

"Yes, poor wretched man," said Lucy, quickly; "terrible to think that some judgment may have overtaken him in the midst of his wickedness—unrepentant, revengeful, cruel."

"That is truly what should move us most, Miss Gerard," observed my tutor; "it is but too probable that he has been suddenly cut off, and that by violence." Then he narrated all that had happened at

Fairburn since the night of Sir Massingberd's disappearance, uninterrupted save once, when Mr. Gerard left the room for a few minutes, and returned with another bottle of "the particular," which it seemed he would not even suffer the butler to handle. Marmaduke sat silent and awestruck, drinking in every word, and now and then, when a sort of shudder passed over him, I saw a little hand creep forth and slide into his, when he would smile faintly, but not take his eyes off Mr. Long—no, not even to reply to hers.

"I think," added my tutor, when the narrative was quite concluded, "that under these circumstances I was justified in coming up to town, Mr. Gerard, since it is just possible that Sir Massingberd may, may——"

"That he may not be dead," interrupted our host, gravely; "there is, of course, that chance, and we must set to work at once to settle the question."

There was a violent ringing at the front-door bell. Mr. Long started up with a "What's that?" Marmaduke's very lips grew white, and trembled. For my part, I confess I congratulated myself that I was on that side of the table which was furthest from any person who might enter the room. Lucy alone maintained a calm demeanour, and looked towards her father, confidently.

"That is Mr. Clint, I have no doubt," observed Mr. Gerard, quietly. "I sent word to him an hour ago to come directly, and, if possible, to bring Townshend with him. Whether Sir Massingberd be alive or not, we shall soon discover, for the great Bow Street runner will be certain to find either his body or his bones."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DETECTIVE OF HALF A CENTURY AGO.

MR. GERARD had hardly finished speaking, when the butler announced Mr. Clint and “another gentleman,” for even among friends the famous Bow Street officer exercised his usual caution; and yet there was scarcely a more public character than Townshend, or better known both to the classes whom he protected, and to that against which he waged such constant war. His personal appearance was itself sufficiently remarkable. A short squab man, in a light wig, kerseymere breeches and a blue Quaker-cut coat, he was not, to look at, a very formidable object. But he possessed the courage of a lion, and the cunning of a fox. The ruffians who kept society in terror, themselves quailed before *him*. They knew that he was hard to kill, and valued not his own life one rush, when duty called upon him to hazard it; that he was faithful as a watch-dog to the government which employed him, and hated by nature a transgressor of the law, as a watch-dog hates a wolf. When Townshend fairly settled himself down upon the track of an offender, the poor wretch felt like the hare whose fleeing footsteps the stoat relentlessly pursues; he might escape for the day, or even the morrow, but sooner or later his untiring foe was certain to be up with him. In those early days, when the telegraph could not overtake the murderer speeding for his life,

and set Justice upon her guard five hundred miles away, to intercept him, and when the sun was not the slave of the Law, to photograph the features of the doomed criminal, so that he can be recognized as easily as Cain, thief-catching was a much more protracted business than it is now; nevertheless, it was at least as certain.

If the facilities for capture were not so great, neither were the opportunities of escape for the offender so many and various. London was not the labyrinth that it has since become, and if any criminal of note forsook it for the provinces, his fate was almost certain. Travellers did not then rush hither and thither, in throngs of a hundred strong, impossible to be individually identified by the railway porter to whom they surrender their tickets; but each man was entered in a way-bill, or scanned with curiosity by innkeeper and post-boy, wherever his chaise changed horses. When any considerable sum was sent by mail-coach, whether by the government or by London bankers, to their provincial agents, it was not unusual to employ Mr. Townshend as an escort. Nor was it altogether unexampled for him to be sent for, as in the present instance, to unravel some domestic mystery; although he was perhaps the first police-officer who had been so employed, the father of all the Fields and Pollakies of the present day. He was on intimate terms, therefore, with many great people, and an especial favourite with the court, his professional services being engaged at all drawing-rooms and state occasions. This, combined with the natural assurance and sense of power in the man, caused Mr. Townshend to hold his head pretty high, and to treat with persons

vastly superior in social station to himself upon at least an equal footing. His easy nod, with which the great Bow Street runner favoured us in Harley Street, that evening, upon his first introduction, was not very much unlike the salutation which Mr. Brummel, at the same period, was wont to bestow upon British marquises and dukes. Having taken his seat at the dessert-table, at the host's desire, he at once began to compliment Mr. Gerard upon the contents of the bottle with the yellow seal, and, in short, behaved himself in all respects as any other guest would have done who was an intimate friend of the family, and had dropped in after dinner upon his own invitation. No sooner, however, did Mr. Clint introduce the subject which had called us up to town, and Mr. Long begin to recapitulate the story of Sir Massingberd's disappearance, than this singular person dropped at once all social pretension, and showed himself the really great man he was. One glass of wine was sufficient for him during the whole narration, and that he seemed to sip mechanically, and rather as an assistance to thought, than because he really enjoyed it, which, however, there is no doubt he did. He only interrupted my tutor twice or thrice, in order to make some pertinent interrogation, and when all had been described (including a slight sketch of Marmaduke's position), he sat for a little silent and noiseless, tapping his wine-glass with his forefinger, and staring into the fire.

"Well, Mr. Townshend, and what is your opinion?" inquired Mr. Gerard a little impatiently. "Do you think that this Lost Sir Massingberd is alive or dead?"

"That is a question which a fool would answer at

once, sir, but a wise man would take some time to reply to," returned the Bow Street runner coolly. "But one thing you may depend upon, that he will not be 'Lost' long. I have blotted that word out of my dictionary. I know Sir Massingberd Heath well, or, at least, I did know him, and that is a great advantage to start with; he was not a man, I should think, to change with age. Tall figure and strong; large piercing eyes; much beard; a mouth that tells he likes to have his own way; and on his forehead a mark as if the devil had kicked him."

"That is excellent," cried Mr. Gerard; "you could not mistake him for any other man in London."

"He is *not* in London, sir," observed the runner dogmatically. "If he were mixing with the lot that he used to be amongst, I should surely have heard of it; and if he is with people much beneath him in station, I should have learned it still more certainly. As for that, however, he is not one—if I remember him right—to hide himself, or work much underground."

"If you mean that he would not stoop to deception, Mr. Townshend," remarked my tutor gravely, "I am afraid you are mistaken; the very money which, as I have said, he obtained from me upon the day of his disappearance, was dishonourably come by. His pretext of the Methodists having bidden for a piece of ground upon which to build a chapel within the Park, and almost opposite the Rectory, was, I have since discovered, entirely false; and I cannot but fear that some judgment has overtaken this unhappy man."

Here, I am sorry to say, that Mr. Clint and Mr.

Gerard looked at one another in rather a comic manner, and the Bow Street runner helped himself to a glass of the particular with an open chuckle.

"Well, sir," responded that gentleman, "you see judgments isn't much in my way. When I catches a chap, he generally knows it's judgment and execution too; but, barring that, I doubt whether there's much of a special Providence for rascals—even when they rob a Church minister. Not, of course, that I am saying Sir Massingberd Heath, baronet, is a rascal, or anything like it; I never had anything to do with him in all my life before this, and that's a good sign, look you. When I said he was not a man to work underground, however, I did not mean that he would not employ every ingenious device—and the one you mention was one of the neatest I ever heard on—to procure money, but that he is of too domineering and masterful a nature to lurk and spy about. The young gentleman here need not be in much alarm, I think, of his relative's turning up in Harley Street; notwithstanding which, he is a very ticklish customer, no doubt, and one as I should not have been in the least surprised to find myself under orders to fit with a pair of bracelets, for such a thing, for instance, as murder."

I think each of us started, and looked at one another in hushed amazement at this statement; and the wine-glass, which Marmaduke was twisting nervously in his fingers, rattled against the table in spite of his efforts to remain calm.

"I mean," observed Mr. Townshend, in explanation, "as the baronet, when I knew him, at least, was venomous, yet likewise hasty; and though cunning

enough, if his temper got the better of him, would do imprudent things. I remember him well-nigh killing his jockey on the course at Doncaster—it was the second year as ever the Leger was run for—and all for no fault of his, but just because he didn't win when his master expected it. I remember how the crowd hissed the gentleman, and the ugly look which he gave them in reply. There was no fuss made about the matter afterwards; but Sir Massingberd had to supply a deal of Golden Ointment to the poor lad's bruises: he was very free-handed with his money at that time. I suppose, by the pace he was then going, that he has not much left."

"He has almost literally not a shilling," replied Mr. Long. "I am quite certain that he had no ready-money in his possession besides the twenty one-pound notes which he obtained from me upon that evening."

"And no means of raising any?" inquired Mr. Townshend.

"None whatever," replied my tutor, positively.

"That simplifies the business a good deal," remarked the Bow Street runner, drawing out his pocket-book. "Now, I suppose you kept the numbers of those notes?"

"Yes, I did. Peter, did you not write them down for me?"

"The notes ran from 82961 to 82980 inclusive," said I.

"A very concise and sensible statement, young gentleman,"¹ remarked the police-officer, approv-

¹ Every lad in my position, not yet turned twenty-one, was a "young gentleman" in these times; we were not so tenacious of our honour as the young men of to-day.

ingly; "I should like, however, to see the figures in black and white." When these had been found among certain memorandums of my tutor, Mr. Townshend copied them, and thus continued: "Now, the first thing as has to be done, gentlemen all—by which no offence is meant to the young lady—is this: we must go to the Bank of England, and find out if any of these here notes have been paid in since November 16th. If they have been, one of two things is certain—Sir Massingberd is spending them, or somebody else is spending them for him. If the latter, it is probable that it is not with his consent; that is, that he can't help it; that is, that he's dead as a ten-penny nail;" and with that the speaker brought down his fist upon the mahogany, as though he were hammering one in.

"We shall leave the case, Mr. Townshend, entirely in your hands," observed Mr. Gerard; "and please to look to me for any expenses you may require."

"Very good, sir," replied the runner, rising as if to take his leave; "but since two or three heads are always better than one, in cases of this sort, and the present company has their wits about them—which is by no means the case with many as I have to do with—I should be glad of a little assistance from yourselves."

"Don't you think we ought to advertise the baronet as missing, and offer a reward?" suggested Mr. Clint.

"There will be no harm in that, of course," replied Mr. Townshend, carelessly; "although I can't say as I have much confidence in advertisements; my

own experience is, that parties who put them in derive some satisfaction from reading them over to themselves, but the advantage don't go much beyond that—except that it sometimes puts people upon their guard as one wants to be off it. I have got a little pressing business on hand to-morrow—in the forging line—and must now be off; but if one or two of you will be at the Bank to-morrow afternoon, at, let us say three o'clock, I shall be sure to be there to meet you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BANK-NOTES.

It was arranged, to my infinite joy, before retiring to rest that night, that I was to make one of the Bank party. Marmaduke insisted on accompanying us, being above measure curious about the matter, and eager to know the worst (or the best) regarding it. Mr. Long had to return to Fairburn for his Sunday's duty, and Mr. Clint could not spare the time from his parchments; so Mr. Harvey Gerard and we two young men went forth upon the trail together. As the paper-chase is the most glorious pursuit undertaken by boys, as fox-hunting is the sport of sports for men, so man-hunting is the avocation fitted for heroes. I know nothing like it for interest and excitement—nothing. If I could only imbue my readers with one-tenth of the absorbing concern with which we, the subordinate actors in this drama of mystery, now began to be devoured, they would be sorry indeed when this narrative comes to a conclusion. We three were at the appointed spot some minutes before the hour which had been agreed upon for meeting the Bow Street runner; but before the chimes of the Old Exchange clock had ceased their "*Life let us cherish*"—the tune which they always played on Fridays—the Bow Street runner appeared.

Passing through a great room within the Bank,

in which, to my unaccustomed eye, were displayed the riches of Cræsus, and where the golden showers seemed unceasingly to rain, we were conducted into a private apartment, where sat some grey-headed official, uncommunicative, calm, like one who has had his glut even of wealth, and to whom money, whether in bullion or paper, was no longer any object.

“Well, Mr. Townshend, what can I do for you?” inquired he, sedately. “I trust you are not come about any fresh wrongs against the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street. I never see your face but I think of an imitation bank-note, and diminution of the stock in our cellar.”

“Thank you, sir,” responded the runner, cheerfully; “I am afraid that I shall have to see you in a day or two respecting a matter of that very kind, but to-day I am come on a different business. A gentleman of high rank has been missing for three weeks, or more; and his absence has given the greatest anxiety to these, his friends. He was known to have in his possession certain one-pound Bank of England notes, twenty in all, of which the numbers are known. We wish to know whether they have been paid in hither in the meantime, and if so, by whom.”

“Have you any order from the deputy-governor?”

“Why, no, sir,” responded the runner, insinuatingly. “I thought that would not be necessary between you and me.”

“Well, well, I suppose you must have your own way, Townshend. You’re a dangerous man to cross. And the old gentleman wagged his head in a blandly humorous manner, and made a little golden music

with his bunch of seals. "The numbers of the notes are here, are they? From 82961 to 80. Very good." Here he rang a silver bell, which presently produced an official personage, something between a gentleman-usher and a pew-opener. "You may show this party over the cancelled department, James; and let Mr. Townshend investigate anything he pleases."

With a not over-courteous nod, the old gentleman resumed his study of a certain enormous volume, that looked, said Marmaduke, like the quarto edition of Chaucer, but which, it is reasonable to conclude, was something else. We were straightway conducted through several vast and echoing chambers, into a spacious fire-proof vault, where the notes that had been paid into the Bank awaited the periodical cremation.

"A week later, and we might not have been in time," remarked the Bow Street runner, "since every bank-note is burned within a month of its having found its way home again. If Sir Massingberd has come to a violent end, and been robbed of his money, we shall probably find it all here, as those who despoiled him would be anxious to get the notes changed at once." Our guide led the way to a certain department of the chamber, with the same accuracy which a student would evince with respect to a shelf in his own library, and took up in his hand a bundle of one-pound notes; they were for the most part very dirty and greasy, but he separated one from the other with a surprising ease and celerity, reading out the numbers as he did so. "82900, 1, 2, 3—now we are getting near it," observed the official. "Let us see, 951, is it not?"

"82961," gasped I, "and the next nineteen." I could scarcely frame the words, so great was my excitement. Marmaduke's eyes gleamed with anxiety and impatience; and even Mr. Gerard held his breath, while the clerk continued, in a dry, mechanical tone:

"51, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 wanting—7, 8, 9 all wanting. 82960—here you have it; 61 wanting; 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. There are none of them here. Stop a bit. 82977—that's one, isn't it?"

"Yes," cried I, "that's one. Pray, let me look at it."

"Certainly not, sir," responded the official severely. "With regard to Mr. Townshend, I have my orders, but as respects him only."

"Perfectly right," remarked the Bow Street runner, approvingly. Then please to give it to me, my man. Are there any more?"

"Yes, there are—78, 79, 80."

"Good. That is four in all, then." The detective took them up, and showed them to me: of course, I could not identify them; but still I felt some awe to think what hands—hands imbued with blood, perchance—those notes might have passed through since I had seen Sir Massingberd thrust them into his pocket.

"I cannot carry these away with me, my good friend, I suppose?" inquired Mr. Townshend, persuasively.

"By no manner of means, Mr. Runner," replied the guardian of these unctuous treasures with dignity. "His Majesty himself would never be so mad as to ask such a thing. A written order from the governor himself would not permit you to do it."

“Very good, sir; then we won’t trouble the governor to write one,” returned the detective, drily. “What I must know, however—permission or no permission—is this: by whose hand were these sweet-smelling and precious articles paid into the Bank of England?”

It would have been amusing, under less anxious circumstances, to have watched the demeanour of these two personages, each jealous of the dignity of those by whom he was employed, and neither in the least disposed to surrender one tittle of his delegated authority.

“That information will, no doubt, be supplied to you,” replied the official, stiffly, “if it is thought right—and not otherwise. Follow me, gentlemen, if you please, and I will direct you to the office where such an application may be made.”

This we did; and, I am bound to say, met with very great civility from the superintendent of the department in question. In spite of the admirable and systematic manner in which the huge establishment was carried on, it was not easy, and in many cases would have been impossible, to discover what individual had paid in any particular note; but every pains and trouble were taken in our behalf to effect this. Out of the four notes, only one, No. 82979, could be identified as having been received from any particular person—one Mr. Worrall, a silk-merchant in the City. Having expressed our warmest thanks to the authorities, we immediately called a coach, and started off to this gentleman’s warehouse. We were so fortunate as to find him in, although he was just upon the point of setting forth to his private

residence. Upon an examination of his books, we discovered no record of the bank-note about which we were concerned; still, he frankly owned to us that such memoranda were not kept with excessive accuracy. "It is possible yet that the people at the Bank may have been correct," observed he. "You had better return there; and since the matter is one of life and death, I do not mind confiding to you, that if that note has passed through our hands at all, it will have the letter W, in red, upon the back of it; it is very small, but still can be deciphered without a magnifying-glass."

"There was no mark," observed I, "upon any of the notes I saw."

"There *was* a mark," remarked the Bow Street runner, reflectively; "and I am pretty sure it was upon this very note. It is no wonder that you did not see it, young gentleman, since your livelihood does not depend, as mine does, upon keeping my eyes about me. The mark in question was also almost obliterated by the red 'Cancelled' which the Bank had placed upon the note; but as far as I could make it out, it was the letter O."

"That is the private mark of the Metropolitan Oil Company," exclaimed Mr. Worrall, without hesitation. "Although, indeed, because I have told my own secrets, I am not sure that I am justified in revealing those of other people. Their offices are in the very next street to this."

Off we started like hounds, who, after a check, have once more struck the scent. Business in the City had by this time greatly diminished, and many of the shops were closed; but the Oil Company's

emporium, as behoved it, was lighted up from cellar to garret, to give assurance to the world that what they sold could turn night, and even London fog, into day. Notwithstanding the extreme luminosity of the premises, we found the accounts of the establishment, however, rather opaque and complicated; and although nothing could exceed the pains which the clerks put themselves to upon our account, it was several hours before No. 82979 could be identified, both as respected its incoming and outgoing. Finally, however, we gleaned the certain information that the note in question had been received only a day or two previously by the Oil Company from a Mr. Vander-seld, the skipper of a foreign vessel, then lying in the port of London, but which, he had informed them, was to sail immediately. He had bought a small quantity of oil for his cabin lamps, and taken it with him, but had ordered a large supply to be sent to his address in Hamburg, and with this address we were made acquainted.

"Well, Mr. Townshend," quoth Mr. Harvey Gerard, as we rolled homewards in a hackney-coach, after seven hours of this man-hunting, "what think you that this news portends? Is the game still afoot, or is it only dead game—quarry?"

"I can speak with no sort of certainty yet," replied the Bow Street runner; "but next to all the notes having been paid into the Bank on the 17th or so—which, as I told you, would have almost indicated Sir Massingberd's murder and robbery, without any doubt—I know of no worse tidings than this, of their having come from Hamburg. There's a regular agency abroad, and particularly in that town,

for the sale of Bank of England notes dishonestly come by. If a thief cannot get to the Bank immediately, to turn his plunder into gold, he sends it across the water; and then it comes back to us at home, through honest hands enough. We must communicate, of course, with Vanderseld; but the probability is that he will be unable to give us any information. These sea-fellows take account of nothing except what concerns their own trade. He may remember the quarter that the wind was blowing from upon the day he had the note, to a nicety; but he won't have a notion, bless you, as to who paid it him. No—it's the worst sign yet, to my mind, that that 'ere note has come through foreign hands. But don't you be down-hearted, my young gentleman," added the Bow Street runner, addressing himself to Marmaduke, who looked very fagged and anxious; "I'll find your respected uncle, mind you, let him be where he will; and if he's dead, why, you shall see his corpse, though I have to dig it up with my finger-nails." With which comforting statement we had, for that evening, to be content.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BENEVOLENT STRANGER.

HAVING written to Mr. Vanderseld of Hamburg, there was nothing, pending the reception of his reply, for even Mr. Townshend to do beyond his favourite occupation of keeping his eyes open. We advertised, however, in the *Morning Chronicle* (a print that at that time was far from looking forward to death from want of circulation, and the having its eyes closed by a penny piece), in the *Times*, and in the *Sun*, and offered a reward of one hundred guineas for tidings of the missing baronet; nor, in spite of the Bow Street runner's depreciating remarks upon this point, were our efforts in that direction wholly thrown away. A full description of Sir Massingberd had appeared in the above newspapers for ten successive days, and on the eleventh the following information came of it. We were all breakfasting in Harley Street, Mr. Long having come up from Fairburn the previous day, when the butler informed us that there was a man waiting in the hall, who wished to see "H. G.," who had put a certain advertisement into the *Sun* newspaper. "Show him in here at once, George," quoth Mr. Gerard, rubbing his hands. "How pleased I shall be if we learn what we wish to know, after all, without any help from Bow Street. I beg you will take a chair, sir." These last words were addressed to

a very respectable-looking person, whom the servant had ushered in, and who bowed to us in a very decorous and unassuming fashion. He was attired in half-mourning, and carried a little black leather bag and an umbrella—the latter a less common companion in these days than a cane is now—as though he had just come off a journey.

“I have called, gentlemen,” said he, “simply in consequence of seeing a notice respecting the disappearance of a certain individual of whose whereabouts I am in a position to inform you.”

“Is Sir Massingberd Heath alive, sir?” gasped Marmaduke.

“Heaven be praised, he *is*, sir,” responded the stranger, fervently.

“Umph,” ejaculated Mr. Gerard, with less piety.

Mr. Long coughed behind his fingers, but otherwise kept a discreet silence.

“You know him, do you, sir?” inquired our host.

“I know him well enough by sight, if, at least, your advertised description of his personal appearance is accurate,” resumed our visitor. “His height, his beard, the curious indentation upon his forehead, are all characteristic of the man whom I saw last night, and whom I have seen every day for weeks. He is living under the name of Daneton, at Nutgall, a village in Cambridgeshire, near which I reside. I have not the slightest doubt whatever of his identity. As for knowing him, except by sight, however, I cannot say that I do. Without meaning offence, or wishing to hurt the feelings of relations, I may observe that his mode of life is scarcely one to make

acquaintance with him advantageous. If I may speak without reserve upon the matter, I should state that he drank considerably, to the extent, indeed, the landlord of the inn has informed me, of, at least, a bottle and a half of French brandy *per diem*."

"That *must* be my uncle," observed Marmaduke, naïvely.

"He is so, sir, without a doubt," continued the stranger. "I do not seek for any pecuniary reward; but having seen your advertisement, I thought it my duty to come up hither, and relieve the feelings of anxious relatives."

Here the door opened, and Mr. Townshend walked in unannounced, as it was his custom to do. Merely nodding to us all, as though he was an inmate of the house, he sat down at the table with his back to the visitor, and helped himself to a roll and butter.

Mr. Gerard explained briefly the stranger's errand to the officer of justice, and then observed, "Are we to understand, then, that you have been so good as to come all the way from Nutgall hither, expressly to give us this information?"

"No, sir," responded the man, with frankness; "I should deceive you if I were to say that much. I have business in the City to-day, and arrived so far by coach; I came on hither, merely a few miles beyond my mark; that is all for which you are indebted to me."

"That is a great deal," observed Mr. Long, warmly. "We take it very kindly that you should have done so much."

"I thought it only my duty, sir," replied the

visitor, modestly. "The trouble I do not take into account."

"What a pity the gentleman did not think of writing by the post," observed Mr. Townshend, still proceeding with his breakfast; "that would have saved him this long expedition, and us many days of anxiety."

"That is very true," returned the stranger; "but the fact is, one does not always like to answer advertisements in that way. How did I know who 'H. G.' was? I thought also that a personal interview would be more satisfactory. I am a poor man, but I did not grudge the chance of losing an hour or two on an errand of charity."

"You are very good," answered Marmaduke, gloomily.

"And you must, please, permit us," added Mr. Long, taking out his purse, "to at least reimburse you for that loss of time."

"It seems to me," observed Mr. Townshend, speaking with his mouth full, "that this gentleman is about to be rather hardly dealt by. It is true that a guinea, or even half a one, may repay him for his lost time; but if his intelligence respecting Sir Massingberd Heath turns out to be such as he represents it, he will be entitled to the hundred guineas reward."

"I never thought of that," observed Mr. Long, returning his purse to his pocket not without a blush. "I hope, sir, that you will acquit me of any sordid design in what I proposed to do."

"Most certainly, sir," returned the stranger, with animation; "and indeed your views, as you just ex-

pressed them, are quite in accordance with my own. I have no wish whatever for the reward in question ; to have done my duty is, I hope, a sufficient recompense for me. On the other hand, I cannot well afford to lose these two or three hours which have been expended in your service. A couple of guineas would quite repay me for this, and even leave the obligation upon my side."

There was a silence for a little, during which Mr. Long gazed inquiringly at Mr. Gerard, and he, in his turn, looked towards Mr. Townshend ; then, as though the back of that gentleman's head had been cognizant that counsel was demanded of it, the Bow Street runner spoke as follows :—

"It would be nothing less than a fraud, in my opinion, if this good gentleman's generosity is taken advantage of in the way he suggests. If the management of this business is to be in my hands, I should say let us behave with rectitude at least, if not with liberality. The hundred guineas are fairly his, if he is correct in what he has told us ; whereas, if he is *not* correct—since no mistake can have occurred in the matter, by his own showing—why, this is merely an attempt to extort money under false pretences."

"Really, Mr. Townshend," cried my tutor, starting to his feet, "I think your profession of thief-catching makes you very unscrupulous in your imputations."

For my own part, I felt excessively indignant too ; and so, I think, would Marmaduke have done had he not been pre-occupied with his own thoughts. Lucy blushed, and cast down her eyes. Her father quietly observed, "Mr. Townshend may have been somewhat plain-spoken, but what he has said is

common sense. If you will be good enough to leave your address at Nutgall with us, sir, we shall communicate with you as soon as we have convinced ourselves of the truth of your suspicions; and then we shall not only have compensation but apologies to offer you."

"Very good, sir," rejoined the visitor, coolly. "My address is upon that card. If I had known the sort of reception that awaited me here, I should not perhaps have been so anxious to do my duty. Gentlemen, I wish you good-day. I am sorry to have interrupted your repast."

"Don't mention it, my good sir," observed the Bow Street runner, as he disposed of his third slice of ham. "I have treated you as no stranger, I assure you."

To this sarcasm the visitor made no reply, but bowing to the rest of the company, was about to withdraw with polite severity, when Mr. Long stepped forward, and took him by the hand. "I believe you are a kindly-hearted man," cried he, "who has been grievously wronged by those whom you have attempted to benefit; but in any case, it cannot do you any harm to have shaken hands with an honest man, and one who is a humble minister of the gospel."

I could have jumped up and shaken hands with the stranger also, but a false shame prevented me. I thought that Townshend was only waiting for the poor fellow to go to become contemptuously cynical upon those who had shown any belief in him. The Bow Street runner, however, said never a word, but proceeded with his interminable breakfast.

Mr. Long was speechless with indignation. I saw Lucy Gerard cast an approving glance at my excellent tutor, and then an imploring one towards her father, who was biting his lips, as if to restrain his laughter.

At last, the rector broke silence. "I gather from what you have stated, Mr. Townshend, that you will scarcely consider it worth while to go down to Nutgall, or make any further inquiry into the circumstances of which you have just heard."

"It will certainly not be worth *my* while," returned the Bow Street runner, curtly.

"Then I shall go down into Cambridgeshire myself," observed my tutor.

"Very good, sir. If time were less valuable to me, it would give me a great deal of pleasure to accompany you."

"My dear Peter," remarked my tutor, taking no notice of this wicked banter, "what do you say to coming with me?"

Even if I had been less disposed to do this than I was, I should still have readily consented to be the rector's travelling companion, for to refuse would have been to declare myself upon the enemy's side.

Accordingly, we set off upon this amateur detective expedition that very day; and on the following evening returned to Harley Street, having possessed ourselves of this important information: That benevolence is sometimes assumed for the base purpose of making a few shillings, and that advertisements are occasionally taken advantage of to the confusion of those who insert them. There was really a village called Nutgall; that was the one fact that the respect-

able person in half-mourning had brought along with his black leather bag and silk umbrella. There was not a public-house in the place where Sir Massingberd could have procured that bottle and a half of French brandy, had he been ever so disposed to dissipation, or even where we ourselves could get bread and cheese.

I verily believe, at the time of his disenchantment, my revered tutor would rather that the baronet had been really at Nutgall, and in the humour and condition to wage implacable war against poor Marmaduke, than have given such an opportunity of triumph to the man of Bow Street.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BETTER THAN A BLUNDERBUSS.

It was the Runner's custom to call at Mr. Gerard's every evening, no matter how often he might have been there during the day, in order to report progress, or that there was none ; and when his knock at the front door was heard, I perceived the rector wince upon his chair, like one who has been roasted a little already, and expects to be before the fire again immediately. Mr. Townshend, however, did not even so much as allude to our Will-o'-the-Wisp pursuit, cautioned, perhaps, not to do so by our host, or besought by his daughter, as I fancy. I do not think that the gravity of the intelligence he brought with him would, of itself, have blunted Mr. Townshend's appetite for acrimonious jesting, which was insatiable ; and, indeed, the issues of Death or Life, and of Lost or Found, formed so much of the ordinary business of his life, that any discovery, no matter of what nature, disturbed him as little as finding a gentleman with his head off disturbs the King of Dahomey.

" Well, Mr. Long, I am glad to see you back again," said he ; " you are the very man I want. Does a farmer of the name of Arabel happen to reside in or near your parish ? "

"He lives at Fairburn, within a stone's throw——"

"You will never make a Bow Street runner," interrupted Mr. Townshend, shaking his head.

"Well, then," continued my tutor, good-humouredly, "if accuracy is so essential, I will say within half a mile and a few yards of my own Rectory."

"That is better, sir," returned the detective, gravely; "and what sort of a character do you consider this man to bear?"

"Mr. Arabel is an honest man and a good churchman," replied the rector, positively; "and but for a little occasional excess——"

"A drunkard, eh?" observed the Bow Street officer, briskly.

"No, certainly not, Mr. Townshend. He takes too much liquor now and then, I believe; but I regret to say it, there are few more sober persons in my parish than Richard Arabel."

"Indeed," observed the other reflectively; "and yet he was the man who paid No. 82979 to Mr. Vanderseld, who trades in grain. I have heard from Hamburg, and have traced the note back again to Fairburn. I start for that place this evening by post-chaise; and if you or Mr. Meredith want a lift, I shall be happy to take one or both of you along with me."

This intelligence astonished us all immensely, and my tutor and myself, who knew the farmer, more than the rest. Such news would have been itself sufficient to have taken the rector home at once; besides, he was not only anxious, as usual, to get

back to his own parish, but somewhat grudged our long-continued absence and intellectual holiday. There did not seem, too, to be any sort of necessity for my remaining longer with Marmaduke, who had found, it was impossible to doubt, a companion far more capable of upholding and encouraging him than I. The Bow Street runner's offer was therefore accepted by both of us ; and in a few hours we took our seats in the same vehicle for Midshire. The chaise was as roomy a one as could be procured, but still, as there was but one seat, I had to assume the position of "bodkin" between my two companions. Their conversation was at first entirely confined to the subject of our expedition, namely, Farmer Arabel, concerning whom the detective expressed his suspicions the more darkly, the more extravagantly he was eulogized by Mr. Long. So vehement was their dispute, that I did not like to interrupt it for a considerable period, during which I endured great inconvenience from sitting upon a substance at once both sharp and hard, contained in one of Mr. Townshend's pockets. If he had been a lady of the present day, I should have known what it was, and perhaps have modestly suffered on without remonstrance ; but since he was not of the softer sex, and certainly did not wear crinoline, I ventured to ask what it was which inflicted such torture.

"I beg your pardon, young gentleman," observed the Bow Street runner, removing the article objected to ; "you was only sitting upon a pair of bracelets with which I may have perhaps to present Mr. Richard Arabel."

"You don't mean to say that you carry handcuffs

in your pocket!" observed my tutor, with a shudder of disgust.

"I mean to say I do, and should as soon think of moving about without 'em, as without my hat and breeches," returned the runner, with a coolness that froze us both into a protracted silence.

The rain fell heavily, as the night drew on, and dashed against the streaming panes with fitful violence. The wind and wet poured in together whenever the window was put down to pay the postboys. I pitied the poor fellows, exposed to such weather, and was glad to see that Mr. Townshend paid them liberally. "There are no persons who are more open-handed travellers than your Bow Street runners," observed Mr. Long, when I remarked to him upon this circumstance in the absence of our friend, who had stepped out while we were changing horses somewhere, for brandy and water; "and the reason of their generosity is this, that other people have to pay for it." I had never heard my tutor utter so severe a speech, and I gathered from it that his indignation against our fellow-wayfarer was as poignant as ever; and yet within half an hour it was fated that all his resentment should be neutralized by gratitude, leaving a large margin of the latter sentiment over and above.

The next stage was over a desolate, treeless heath, where the elements had their own way against us more than ever, and our vehicle seemed actually to shrink and shudder from the force of their onslaught. All of a sudden, I was thrown forward against the opposite window by the stoppage of the postchaise. At first I thought a horse had fallen; but imme-

diately afterwards the window next to Mr. Long was violently pushed down from without, and a something black and small, which was a pistol, was protruded into the carriage.

"Your money or your life! Come, be quick, curse you, and don't keep gentlemen waiting in the wet," said a rough voice. "Be quick, I say." A volley of oaths accompanied this unpleasant request.

"I have only a couple of guineas with me," cried Mr. Long, quietly, "and you will not make it more by swearing."

"That's a lie!" remarked the voice, very uncivilly, "for you're a parson, you are, and they've always money enough. Ain't he a parson, postboy? Didn't you say so, when I asked you who you'd got inside there? Come here, won't yer?"

At these words, one of the wretched postboys, shivering and dripping, came forward to the window, and stammered out, "Really, gentlemen, I couldn't help it; he swore as he'd blow out my brains, if I didn't tell; so I told him as one was a clergyman, I believed, but the other two——"

"My name is Townshend," interrupted the Bow Street runner, with great distinctness. "If you had happened to know that, boy, and had informed these gentlemen of the circumstance, I am sure they would never have stopped us, unless, indeed, it was to inquire after my health." At the same time he thrust his broad face out of the window into the light thrown by a lantern carried by one of the robbers; for there were several dim forms on horseback, as I could now perceive. If a blunderbuss had been exhibited instead, it could not have caused one-half of the panic which

the sight of his features occasioned; each robber turned his back at once, as though to prevent the recognition being mutual, and spurred away into the darkness, leaving nothing but the dismounted postboy to evidence that they were not mere phantoms of the night.

“Get to your saddle, and make you up for lost time,” said the Runner, sternly; and when this mandate had been obeyed, and we were once more on our way, he added, “That postboy sold us; I saw him whispering to a man on horseback in the inn-yard while I was taking some drink in the back-parlour; he was never asked any question when the chaise was stopped. That was Jerry Atherton, too, who put his shooting-iron in at that window; I should know his voice though a mob were shouting with him. A man who wishes to do something of which the consequences are so very serious, should not only wear crape, but keep his mouth shut.”

“We have to thank you very much, I am sure,” said Mr. Long. “It was a great providence for us that you were with us.”

“Very likely, sir,” returned Mr. Townshend, grimly; “but not for Jerry, nor yet for the postboy.”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FALSE SCENT.

I AM now drawing near the end of this strange, eventful narrative, and my readers will learn in a chapter or two what has in reality become of Lost Sir Masingberd: whether he lies dead in Fairburn Chase, notwithstanding that strict search of ours, or somewhere else, conveyed by foemen's hands; or if alive, he keeps in hiding nigh, for some evil end, or has even left British soil for a time, to return, according to his threat, on a day when he is least expected. If his real whereabouts and true position have been guessed, then is he who hit upon it a wiser man, not only than I was at that time (which might easily be), but wiser than that genius of Bow Street, whose eye was reported to see further into very millstones than any man alive of his time. He arrived at Fairburn with his handcuffs and his suspicions, and would, I verily believe, have made me his stalking-horse whereby to come down upon the guileless Farmer Arabel, and extract what might be tantamount to a confession.

"You know him, Mr. Meredith," he had observed to me in his frankest tone, as we walked out together after breakfast, on the morning after our arrival; "and I look to you to make the matter easy. We will step over to the farm at once, if you please, and have a glass of home-brewed with the good man, when, I

daresay, he will tell us what we want to know, and exculpate himself at the same time."

"Mr. Townshend," I replied, gravely, "I have been made a catspaw of already, within a few weeks, and until the remembrance of that event has worn off very considerably, I shall not act that part again."

"Very good, sir," responded the Runner, cheerfully. "I only thought that, being a well-wisher to the person in question, you might have made the thing less unpleasant for him. If you went with me, introducing me as a gentleman from London, anxious to see good farming, for instance—that 'ud tickle him—I could bring the subject of the note into conversation; then, if he explained to my satisfaction, as he will doubtless be able to do, how he got possession of it, it will not be necessary to inquire further. He need never know as a police-officer had been down here with darbies in his pocket, upon the chance of having to fit them on his wrists upon the charge of Wilful Murder."

"There is certainly something in that," said I, musingly.

"There is everything in it," returned Mr. Townshend, stepping carelessly over the stile, on the other side of which ran the pathway to Mr. Arabel's residence. "The idea of this man's guilt being, as you say, quite preposterous, it would only be a kindness on your part to spare his feelings. That's a fine stout old fellow looking at those men at work in yonder field, a sort of man that carries his years better than one sees people do in London: I should say, now, that might be the farmer himself."

"Really," said I, stopping short, "I think you

had better do this business of yours alone, Mr. Townshend. I have eaten and drunk in Mr. Arabel's house, and to be concerned in any such errand as this seems but a poor return for his hospitality."

"Ah! it *is* him, is it? Very good, sir. Well, you may just please yourself as to accompanying me now. When I have once set eyes on my man, it is not my habit to lose sight of him. Still, you might have made it easier—for *him*, that is. It is no matter to me whether the thing is done soft or hard." And the Bow Street runner stepped along as he spoke, like a diligent man, who sees his work cut out before him.

After a moment's indecision, I followed upon Mr. Townshend's heels.

"That's right, young gentleman," observed he, approvingly, but without even turning his head. "Those is turnips, I suppose, and very good they are with capers and a leg of mutton; as to wheat, I am not acquainted with it, at least, so as to know it from oats and barley, unless when it's in ear. Agriculture is one of them things to which I have not yet given my attention; but I means to do so, and I have come here for wrinkles concerning it. Remember that, if you please."

"Very well," said I, sheepishly, for I was obliged to confess to myself that Mr. Townshend had got the better of me; and in a few more strides we had got within earshot of the farmer. This was not indeed very near, but Mr. Arabel had excellent lungs, and bade me welcome as soon as he had recognized me.

"Glad to see you, as likewise any friend of yours, Master Meredith. So the rector is back, I hear; and

the wise folks in London can tell no more what has become of Sir Massingberd than we poor folks."

"No, Mr. Arabel, they cannot; on the contrary," said I, determined that there should be no hypocrisy upon my part at least, "here is one of them, who is come down to Fairburn for information, and relies upon you to give it to him too."

"I should like to know when you saw Sir Massingberd last," observed the Bow Street runner quietly, "and under what circumstances?"

"That is soon told," returned the farmer, simply; "but perhaps you would rather step in out of the cold, and take a drop of something while you hear it."

"No, I thank you," said I, firmly, determined that the laws of hospitality should not be thus infringed with my consent, "I must return to the Rectory at once."

"Then I will walk with you," observed the farmer, civilly, "and tell you all I know in a few words. The fact is, the squire and I had not been on good terms for a length of time before his disappearance. He was a bad landlord, and did not know how to behave to a tenant as would have done his duty by him. He wanted his own rent paid to the day, and never had to ask it from me, for that matter; but when he owed a little money himself it was dreadful hard to get it out of him. There happened to be something due from him to me—it was a small matter, made up of little things—corn for that horse he bought for Master Marmaduke, among others, but the thing had been owing for a year or more. I had not deducted it from the rent, and therefore he ought to have been

the readier to pay it; but he was not, and at last I cut up rough about it, and went to the Hall myself on the 15th of last month, and then we rather fell out together, the Squire and me."

"You quarrelled, did you?" remarked Mr. Townshend, carelessly.

"Well, yes, we did quarrel; leastways, *I* did. Sir Massingberd always quarrelled with whoever asked him for payment, so that was nothing. I said that I would not leave the house without the money; but at last I did leave upon his solemn promise to pay me the next day, that was the very day of his disappearance, and he did pay me, with as many oaths as one-pound notes into the bargain."

"He paid you these on the 15th of November, then," observed the detective.

"On the 16th," replied the farmer. "I've got a memorandum of it in my pocket-book; here it is, and the number of the notes, 82977 to 80; there was four in all."

"And those notes you sent to your London agent along with more, and you got some foreign stuff back from Hamburg in exchange for them.

"And how the deuce come you to know that?" exclaimed the farmer, in extreme astonishment.

"Well, it is my business to know a good many things," returned the Bow Street runner, getting over the stile rather sulkily; for he was well aware by this time that there would be no employment for his favourite bracelets.

"Well, that may be your friend's business," quoth Mr. Arabel, looking after his retreating form; "but I'm gormed if he looks like it. I should have said he

was an individual in the same line as myself, only fatter; and though I say it as shouldn't say it, a sight more foolish."

"Nay," said I, "he is not a foolish man, Mr. Arabel, far from it; although I think he has come down to Fairburn upon a fool's errand."

CHAPTER XXXI.

“LET IT BE PETER’S GODCHILD.”

I HAVE said that I am approaching the conclusion of this my story, and so in truth I am, so far as the readers thereof are concerned in it. They will soon be put in possession of its secret, and close this volume, not altogether without regret, as I hope. But for me, and those who played their parts in this drama of mystery, months and years went by without the least clue to its solution. Fairburn Hall remained without a master, although not untenanted. The same servants occupied it as before, and expected, although with less and less of certainty, that the Squire would presently return and claim his own again. The principal rooms, as was stated, had been locked up and sealed ever since his disappearance, and the very neighbourhood of their doors had begun to be avoided after dark. Noises were affirmed to have been heard in them, both canine and human—doubtless the ghostly talk held between Grimjaw and Sir Massingberd, who had now no longer any reason for silence concerning that evil deed in which they had been concerned together so long ago. The baronet’s voice was also heard in the Park and Chase, especially upon windy nights, cursing and threatening in a very vehement and life-like manner ; so that

his preserves were almost as well protected by the terror of his absence, as they had been by that of his presence. Reckless, indeed, must have been the poacher who wired hares or slaughtered pheasants in the Home Spinney, where the dread Sir Massingberd must have met with his end, or been spirited away, no man knew how or whither. Had it not been for this superstitious awe, Oliver Bradford would have found it difficult to guard his master's game ; for the old keeper, crippled with age and rheumatism, could no longer watch o' nights himself, nor could he easily induce his subordinates to do so, unless in pairs. They, too, had little liking to be alone in the Home Spinney after dusk, nor near the Wolsey Oak, which of late years had had certain portentous tenants in the shape of the two ravens, which were for ever flying to and fro between it and their lodging in the church tower. The old ancestral saying—

“ Ill for Heaths when raven's croak,
Bodeful comes from Wolsey's Oak ”—

was remembered and repeated by the old folks of Fairburn to the rising generation, with many a solemn head-shake and significant pursing of the lips. Yet, oddly enough, the general opinion, even of these ancient gossips, was, that Sir Massingberd was yet alive. The misfortune prophesied by the ravens was held to concern the family, or, in other words, young Marmaduke, rather than his uncle. If the behaviour of these intelligent birds proclaimed that the Squire was dead, they deserved rather to be held as doves of good tidings than what they were. No ; Sir Massingberd was alive, and would turn up some day or

other, wickeder than ever. His return was as confidently looked for by many of his vassals, as that of Barbarossa was wont to be.

This was not, of course, the case with reasonable persons like Mr. Long, and, I may add, myself. When a twelvemonth had elapsed since his disappearance, we both entreated Marmaduke to come down to Fairburn, and take possession of what might fairly be considered his own. Mr. Gerard and Mr. Clint were equally anxious that he should do this, but all persuasion was unavailing. The most that could be extracted from him was the promise that when he came of age, a year and a half hence, he would do as we pleased. It seemed to us, indeed, the height of improbability that his uncle should still be in the land of the living. It seemed so to the money-lenders, who showed themselves anxious to accommodate the young man with enormous loans at a very trifling rate of interest ; but to the heir himself, it by no means appeared so certain. There was something characteristic, he thought, of his terrible uncle in this mysterious withdrawal from human ken, with the fiendish object of throwing everything out of gear for years, and thus striking terror by his sudden reappearance. If he did reappear and found another—and that one his hated nephew—in the enjoyment of his property, how diabolical would be his wrath ! There was often quite a sublimity of passion evinced by the old baronet upon very slight occasions ; but all such displays, compared to what would happen in the case supposed, would have been but as a cavalry inspection at the Curragh to the Balaklava charge. Such were the thoughts, I am convinced, which

actuated Marmaduke, although he did not express them. He confined himself to stating that he did not consider he had a right to take possession of Fairburn until the time he mentioned had elapsed (nor, indeed, was he legally entitled to do so for seven years); and I doubt if he would have given even that promise, had he not felt sure that some revelation would be made in the meantime.

But no such revelation *was* made, and the day of Marmaduke Heath's majority came round at last. Whether he would even then have put his purpose of coming down to Fairburn into effect, had it depended solely upon himself, I cannot say, but he had by that time other interests to consult beside his own. Marmaduke Heath and Lucy Gerard were man and wife; nor, if you had sought all England through, would you have chanced upon a nobler-looking couple. At that period, although it was not so afterwards, the dependence, the reliance, the looking up for comfort and for counsel, so natural and so endearing in wedded life, were upon the wrong side—upon Marmaduke's, not Lucy's. All that was done in respect to his affairs was done by her; he only thought about doing them, and resisted their being done until the very last, when, all other means having failed, her sweet voice was called in by the councillors for his good, and always succeeded. In one matter only had Marmaduke refused even to listen to her—he had insisted upon raising a very large sum upon his now excellent expectations, and settling it upon her before his marriage. In vain he had been assured that such a settlement was unnecessary, and the interest he would have to pay for the money bor-

rowed, absolutely thrown away. The young man had his way in this; and on the day after the execution of the deed in question they were married. I had determined within myself not to be present at that wedding, in spite of a very pressing invitation, and although Mr. Long himself attended it.

"What, not go to see Marmaduke married?" cried my tutor, when I told him of this intention. I call him still by that name, although he was at this time merely my host, with whom I was stopping during one of my Oxford vacations. "Why, Meredith, you astonish me beyond measure. I am sure that neither of them will think I have rightly married them, unless you are there to be bridegroom's man. Why, Lucy Gerard loves you, Peter, almost as much as she does Marmaduke himself; while Mr. Gerard, between you and me, would, I think, have preferred——" Then I broke down all of a sudden, and laid my face between my hands upon the table, and sobbed like a child.

"Peter, Peter, my dear boy," exclaimed the Rector, laying his fingers—ah, so pitifully—upon my head; "I had not dreamed of this. Poor lad, poor lad, God comfort you and strengthen you; I feel for you as though you were my very own son. What blind worms must we have been not to have seen this before; or, rather, how bravely must you have hidden it from us all! She doesn't know it, does she? I trust not. Then let her never know it, Peter. I do not speak of others, for your feelings deserve to be considered as much, and more, dear lad. But, oh, think of hers. What bitterness will mingle with her cup of happiness upon that day, when she feels that

you are absent from such a cause—for she will guess the cause at once, Peter.”

“I will be ill,” groaned I. “Heaven knows that I shall feel ill enough, and that shall be my excuse.”

“And do you think Marmaduke would marry, knowing that his best friend lies ill and alone here? He would never do that. They would feel, I hope, too, that if it were so, I should not have left you. No, Peter; you have been very strong hitherto—be strong unto the end. Let her never know that you have suffered and are suffering now for her sweet sake.”

“I will do what you think is best, dear old friend,” said I; “but please to leave me by myself a little just now.”

And he did so; and I battled with my own heart and subdued it, and when Marmaduke and Lucy were married I was present.

“My dear Peter, your hand is as cold as a stone!” exclaimed the bridegroom, when he wished me “Good-bye” that day. But Lucy said nothing, save “Good-bye, Peter;” and even to that I could not reply. They were very happy, those two, as indeed they deserved to be. Whatever was wanting at that time in him, her good sense supplied; while in her, neither then nor afterwards, was there anything wanting. She had sympathized as much as lay in her power in the tastes and opinions of her father; she had had a bringing-up which, in these days, would have at least resulted in what is called a strong-minded woman, rather as opposed to a gentle one. This could scarcely, indeed, have been the case with Lucy, but her marriage with Marmaduke

made it impossible. Her mind had heretofore been, as it were, all orchard, bringing forth fine and vigorous fruit; a portion of it now became a garden, producing flowers dainty and rare. Her teacher being also her lover, it was no wonder that her progress was rapid; and it is probable that the young student had never found his studies so sweet as when communicating them to such a pupil. From her father she had learned philosophy; from her husband, how to appreciate all that was beautiful in Nature and touching in Song. As for her politics, Marma- duke was infinitely more solicitous to imbue her with correct views respecting the poets, which, perhaps, was fortunate enough. She would never have admitted, even to please him, that her beloved father was wrong, or even extreme in his view of government; and, in truth, those opinions of hers—so enthusiastic, so trustful, and founded upon the mistake of believing all her fellow-creatures as guileless as herself—gave her conversation an added charm. To hear her talk of wrongs and rights, with heightened colour and earnest eyes—no matter how elevated the rank of the person addressed, nor how nearly connected with the very executive of whose acts she was complaining—was enough to make a bishop exchange his mitre for a white hat, and adopt the Thirty-nine Articles recommended by Mr. Hone.

“Judge Jeffreys himself could never have had the heart to condemn my Lucy for a rebel,” Mr. Harvey Gerard was wont to say; “although,” he would add, with a cynical twinkle in his eye, “I would not trust my Lord Ellenborough.”

Mr. Long and myself were both in Harley Street upon the day when Marmaduke came of age ; and after dinner, Mr. Clint made a little speech, not without connivance, I think, beforehand with others of the party. He observed, that gratifying as was the occasion in question in all respects, it was most satisfactory to himself, as concluding the period which Marmaduke had assigned as the limit of his abstaining from taking his rightful position in the world. He ventured to say this much upon his own part, as having been connected with the Heath family for a lengthened period ; but he would also say for others—what he knew they would be backward to say for themselves—that his young friend owed it to them also not to delay the matter any longer.

Marmaduke's face expressed more painful agitation than I had seen it wear for months. "I suppose you are right, Mr. Clint," he returned ; "and, at all events, I will be as good as my word, which I passed to Mrs. Heath," and he looked at his wife, as though he would have appealed to her to release him from that promise.

"Of course, I am right, sir," returned the lawyer quickly ; "but you are wrong and very uncivil not to give your wife her proper title. Lady Heath, I beg to drink your very good health ; Sir Marmaduke, here's to your better manners ;" and the lawyer emptied his glass, and filled it up again, in case any other excuse should arise for the drinking of good liquor.

"Lady Heath's health ; her husband's better manners," echoed laughingly round the table.

Marmaduke nerved himself by a strong effort, and replied to this toast with feeling and eloquence. He promised to accede to the request made by Mr. Clint, and to that end would return with us to Fairburn on the next day but one, to make his arrangements personally for coming to reside at the Hall. As for his not having assumed the title, he protested, amidst merriment, that he had not hitherto done so, solely out of deference to the feelings of his father-in-law, whom he had once heard describe a baronet as a something only not quite so bad as a lord.

We were all delighted not only with the intentions Marmaduke thus expressed, but with the cheerfulness and gaiety of his manner in speaking of them; and when the rest had retired for the night, and my old friend and I were in my room having that last chat by the midnight fire which is perhaps the zenith of human converse, as the curtain lecture is undoubtedly the nadir, I could not help congratulating him on his change of spirits. “That you are a happy man, I know,” said I; “you would be ungrateful indeed if you were otherwise. But I cannot say how pleased I am to find that the good Genius, who has so blessed you in other respects, has exorcised this phantom fear of yours; that you no longer dread that childish bugbear, Sir Massingberd.”

“Hush!” cried he, looking involuntarily over his shoulder; “do not mention that name, Peter. I would gladly give up house and land this moment, never to go back to Fairburn; I have a presentiment that evil will come of it. She would absolve me from my promise even now—Heaven bless her, as it must do, for she is of the angels!—but that there will be

another soon whose interests must be looked to as well as our own. You will be godfather, dear Peter, will you not? Lucy and I both wish it. 'Let it be Peter's god-child, Marmaduke,' she said to me only yesterday, although I should not divulge these secrets to an old bachelor like you."

Of course, I promised readily enough; but long after he had bidden me good-night, I sat over the paling embers, thinking, thinking; and when every coal was charred, and the black bars cold that held them, I sat thinking still. My hopes, for a few fleeting hours, long ago, had been as bright and warm as they, and were now as dark—and dead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TAKING THE SEALS OFF.

MARMADUKE HEATH came down to Fairburn according to his promise, but it cost him a great effort. With every stage his spirits seemed to fall and fail; and when Mrs. Myrtle at last clasped him in her arms—for Master Marmaduke was ever a great favourite of hers, and the fact of his having grown up and got married weighed with her not a feather—his wan face was paler than when she had seen it last, notwithstanding its three years of happiness and freedom. It was Christmas-time; the Rectory was a bower of ivy and holly-berries; and just within the threshold, the locality which the good housekeeper had chosen for her embrace, hung a huge bough of mistletoe, the finest that could be found in all the Chase. In the spotless kitchen, so exquisitely clean that you might, as the phrase goes, “have eaten your dinner off the floor,” if it had not happened to have been a sanded one, there were preparations for sumptuous feasting; a delightful fragrance, suggestive of mince-pies with plenty of citron, pervaded Mrs. Myrtle’s private parlour, where the divine mysteries of Apicius were being celebrated. The little larder, cold and immaculate as a dead sucking-pig ready for the spit, was victualled with noble meats as for a siege; while monstrous pasties and plum-puddings,

too many for the broad stone slabs, reposed upon the Dutch tiles that formed its carpet. It was not intended that the inhabitants of the Rectory should eat all the good things themselves; but it was a custom of Mr. Long, aided and abetted by Mrs. Myrtle, to keep open house for about a fortnight at this festive period, and to entertain certain worthy persons, who were old and indigent, in the sanded kitchen daily. Attempts to edify the poor in those days were not made so often as they are at present, but it was held essential by good Christian country folk to keep Christmas as a feast, and to see that others kept it. I suppose Fairburn Hall was the only house in the county where that blessed time was ignored and taken no account of; Sir Massingberd had never suffered the slightest honour to be paid to it; and his worthy deputy and *locum tenens*, Richard Gilmore, treated it with the like contumely.

The change from the bright little Rectory, with all its hospitable preparations, to the gloomy grandeur of the masterless mansion, was very striking, when we three crossed the road next morning, to take the seals off, which Mr. Long had placed upon the principal rooms, and so, as it were, to break the blockade caused by the baronet's disappearance. The contrast began even with things without. Half one of the globes had been sliced from its pedestal on one side of the great iron gates; and in the very centre of the avenue, the grass grew long and rank. The sun-dial was cracked and gaped in zig-zag, an emblem of the uncertainty that overhung the place. The heraldic beasts at the foot of the entrance-steps were much more mutilated than when I had seen them last, and

had indeed only one stone fore-paw or claw between them. Disuse is sister to Abuse, but still how comes it that mere absence should beget, as it always does, such absolute Ruin? Had the Squire been at home the last three years, the globe upon the pedestal would have been whole, the dial flawless, the griffins with at least their larger limbs intact; and yet no man was ever seen to work this mischief. When the great door swung reluctantly back to admit the new possessor, he took my hand, and bade me Welcome, but his tone was far from gay. Every glance he cast around him evoked, I could see, some unpleasant association, and even, perhaps, a vague terror.

There is something uncanny in exploring any dwelling, the rooms of which have been locked up and unvisited for years—places that have been once consecrated to humanity, but have afterwards been given up to Solitude and slow decay. Memories of their ancient inmates seem to hang gloomily about them, like the cobweb in their corners; they are eloquent of desertion and of death. The shriek of the mouse, and the singing of the blue fly in the pane, have perhaps alone been heard there in the interim; but there seem to have been other and ghostlier noises, which cease at our approach. Who knows what eerie deeds our sudden intrusion may have interrupted!

“What faces glimmered through the doors,
What footsteps trod the upper floors,”

ere we broke in! The peculiar circumstances under which our search was made intensified these feelings

in us three, and even Gilmore, who accompanied us, was affected by them.

“O’er all there hung the shadow of a fear;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
This place is *worse* than haunted.”

The library was the first room we entered, which, even in the palmiest days of Fairburn Hall, had been a dreary room, because the least in use. Except Marmaduke himself, no one ever sat there; the wicked books, which were the only sort read and patronized by Sir Massingberd, were all in the Squire’s private sitting-room, and the gaps in the shelves that lined the present apartment, revealed that the Heaths had laid in a considerable stock of them. Old Sir Wentworth, a miser in his old age, had been a dunce in his youth, and was once heard openly to regret that circumstance from the fact, that he was unable to peruse the loose continental literature which his ancestors had provided for his delectation, free of expense. In the rare cases when the Oak Parlour had not sufficient accommodation for the guests of the missing Squire, they had been wont to adjourn to the present apartment, to smoke and lounge through half the night; but it bore no trace of having been so used. Every chair and sofa were in their appointed place, as though they had grown up like trees through the dusty carpet. Upon the tables and mantelpieces, the dust had settled inches thick. The grate was laid ready for lighting; but over the coals and sticks hung a sort of mildew, that looked as if it would have defied a pine-torch to

set light to it. These things we remarked gradually, one by one, for the butler had only opened the shutters of one window, and the extent of the apartment was prodigious. The shelves were filled almost entirely with quartos—books were not hand-books in those days—rich with plates, and “meadows of margin;” you could not have sent a child on an errand to bring one of them; if he had managed to extricate a tome at all by painfully loosening it at head and foot, it might have fallen out and brained him. A fourth of the entire stock was composed of books of Catholic theology. “Those,” observed Mr. Long, “are the most valuable things in the library. Sir Nicholas is supposed to have won his bride by paying that costly tribute to her faith. The illuminations are most rare and splendid. Why, what is this, Gilmore? I can’t get this volume down. It seems stuck to the others.”

The butler grinned maliciously. “I think you will find them all like that, sir. There’s nothing but the wood-backs left. The Squire disposed of these books soon after Mr. Marmaduke left, and got this imitation stuff put up instead.”

Mr. Long broke out into wrathful indignation, but the young heir kept silence, only smiling bitterly.

“Perhaps he was afraid that their heterodoxy might do his nephew harm,” remarked I, rather tickled, I confess, by this characteristic fraud.

“No, sir,” replied Gilmore, drily; “he merely observed, that, being theological works, there was as much in them now as before.”

“Impious wretch!” exclaimed the Rector. “See,

he has bartered the Fathers of the Church for a set of empty backgammon boards, and lettered them with their venerable names."

"Here, however, is the Family Bible," said I; "he has not sold that."

The spider had spun his web across the sacred volume, but it opened readily enough at the only place, perhaps, into which its late owner had ever looked—the huge yellow fly-leaf, upon which were inscribed the names of the later generations of the Heaths; Sir Massingberd's birth in his father's own handwriting, and Sir Wentworth's death in that of his son's, and only too probably his murderer's. The autograph was bold and flaring, quite different from the crabbed hand of the parent, in which the names of Gilbert Heath and Marmaduke's mother were also written, as likewise that of Marmaduke himself. There was a little space beneath the last; and the young heir, looking over my shoulder, pointed to it, significantly; doubtless, it had been hoped by the last possessor of the volume that this might one day have been filled up by the date of his nephew's demise.

We were about to leave the room, when Mr. Long suddenly exclaimed, "Nay, let us try the secret way. You told me, I remember, that you did not know of Jacob's ladder, Marmaduke. The spring lies in the index of Josephus, a wooden volume, which perhaps put this notion of wholesale 'dumbies' into Sir Massingberd's head." This practical satire upon the unpopularity of the Jewish historian was presently discovered, hidden away upon one of those ground-floor shelves, which, if the enthusiastic student in-

vestigates at all, it must be upon his knees. After a little manipulation, the spring obeyed, and with a surly creak, as if in protest, the whole compartment of shelves above moved slowly outward on some hidden hinge, and disclosed the narrow stairs that ended in the shepherdess of the state chamber. The steps were worm-eaten, and the wall on both sides hung with moth-devoured and ragged tapestry. Marmaduke shrank back, and gazed upon the aperture with abhorrence and dismay. To what vile purposes might it not have been used, besides that of attempting to overthrow a poor child's reason: nay, was it not possible that what we had sought, yet feared to find for so long, might be in this very place, where no eye could have looked or thought of looking! Might it not have hidden there, and been imprisoned alive in righteous retribution, by the very spring which had ministered to hate and cruelty? "I went up here," said Mr. Long, divining the young man's thoughts, "when I searched the house with Gilmore, and put on the seals. I think we should climb Jacob's ladder, Marmaduke; as you will make the Hall your home, it is well to leave no spot in it associated with any unpleasantness, unfamiliar." So saying, the Rector led the way, and we all followed: there was some delay while he opened the door above, and certainly it was not a cheerful position for us in the meantime, cooped up in the darkness, with the arras touching us with its ghostly folds on either side the narrow way; but I think that my tutor's advice was good, and that his old pupil experienced a feeling of satisfaction when the thing was done. Once more we stood together

in that state bedroom where Marmaduke had suffered such ghastly terrors when a boy.

"Shall I ever forget those nights!" muttered he with a shudder. "Can this room ever be otherwise than hateful to me! It was here, as I sat weak and ill in that arm-chair, that my uncle struck me for losing——. Stay, now I remember it all. Remove this skirting-board, Gilmore; take the poker; do not spare the rotting wood. Ay, there it is." A yellow something lay amid the dust and rubbish, which on inspection turned out to be a gold pencil-case. "That was lent me by my uncle, a dozen years ago," said Marmaduke musing, "and he chastised me for losing it. It had rolled under yonder skirting-board, but I was too terrified at the time to recollect the fact. I wish I could forget things now. Undo the other shutters, Richard. Light, more light."

And thus we let the blessed sunlight into all the shuttered rooms. It glanced in galleries on knights in all their panoply, and smote the steel upon their visors, as though the flame of battle once more darted from their eyes; it made their tattered pennons blush again, and tipped their rusted spears with sudden fire. It flashed upon the stern ancestral faces on the wall, and through their dust evoked a look of life. That winter sun had not the power to warm, however; all things struck cold. The dark oak-panels chilled us from their waveless depths; the cumbrous organ, carved with fruit and flowers, kept frozen silence; while in the chapel, Sir Nicholas in stone and mildew struck to our marrow. His lady opposite, upon her knees in her "devout

oratory," gave us cold looks, as though we had interrupted her devotions. In vain the painted windows, high and triple arched, cast down "warm gules," upon her marble breast, and filled the sacred place with glorious hues. In vain the gilded scroll "Praise for hys Soule," appealed to us through dust and damp, and his memorial pane blushed scarlet in its endeavour to perpetuate his infamy. All things seemed cursed in that accursed house; the hallowed places desecrated, and those where hospitality and good fellowship were meant to reign, solitary and barren. There was one apartment still which had been left by common consent to be visited last of all—Sir Massingberd's oak parlour. There he might have been said to have lived, for it was the only sitting-room he used from early morning—and he was no great sleeper—until very late at night. There, as we have seen, he had held his audiences, and dined, and sometimes slept after any deep debauch. By all the household, except Gilmore, it was held as a Bluebeard's chamber, and would not have been entered upon any account, even had it not had the Rector's seal upon it. It was here that the lost baronet had passed his last hours within the house, and thither he had intended to return—if he had meant to return at all—before he retired for the night. The butler entered it first, and let the light in; then Mr. Long, then I, then Marmaduke. Although I had been there once before, I scarcely recognized the place, for upon that occasion the Squire himself had occupied it, and I had had no eyes except for him. It was doubtless a comfortable room enough when the fire was shining on its

polished walls, and the red curtains snugly drawn over the windows ; but with that thin December light—for it was afternoon by this time—creeping coldly in upon the three-year-old ashes of the burnt-out fire, and on the panels, smeared with spots and stains, it was very cheerless :

“ There was no sign of life, save one :
The subtle spider, that from overhead
Hung like a spy on human guilt and error,
Suddenly turn’d, and up its slender thread,
Ran with a nimble terror.”

This insect had woven its webs in every nook and cranny, in readiness for the prey that rarely came, and the slanting pillars of motes and light that streamed into the gloom seemed almost as palpable as they. A door led up by three or four steps into Sir Massingberd’s bedroom—a bare unfurnished place, where skins of wild animals, instead of carpet, were spread for a banquet to the moth. His shooting-boots stood up still stiff and strong beside the empty grate, although they were white with mildew, and his night-gear lay folded upon the rotting pillow, in preparation for his rest. The sitting-room, however, bore the more striking vestiges of its late proprietor.

The huge arm-chair stood a little aside from the fender, where he had pushed it back as he rose to leave the room ; and the book which he had been reading lay open with its face to the table, ready for him to resume its perusal upon his return. A spirit-case with the stoppers in, the couple of cigars which it had been Sir Massingberd’s invariable custom to smoke before going to bed, and a few fly-blown

lumps of sugar, were set out in hideous travesty of creature-comfort. The Rector took up the volume, and with one involuntary glance towards the fire-place, tore the wrinkled and blue-spotted leaves to fragments. A scurrilous French novel had engaged the last hours of the wretched old man, ere he went forth—to his doom.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FAIRY'S WAND.

THERE are but few of us, I fear, who can say: "Though I should die suddenly, and at the most unlooked-for time, there will be nothing left behind me which I would have destroyed, even though I had had the opportunity." Of course there are none who can boast that they are at peace with all mankind; that they leave nothing unrepented of or unatoned for; that their human affairs and social relations are exactly where they would have wished them to be. But independent of these matters, neglected by the very best of us, how eagerly must many a man desire, between the warning and swift stroke of death, that he had had but a little time—a little strength to set, not, indeed, his house in order, but his desk and his note-book. What a cruel shock have many a family received, after they have lost the Head whom they have worshipped so many years, by discovering, where they looked for no such thing, *after his death*, that he had all along (as will be thought) been even such a one—not as themselves, but worse—as they whom they had been taught by his own self to look upon with contempt, or at least with pity; as they who, by contrast with himself, were persons base and vile. Is there no letter, reader, ragged and time-worn, perhaps, but

still legible, lying among that heap of correspondence you intend to winnow some day—which it will be better to burn *now*? Is there no half-forgotten gift, meant for your own eyes alone, when they were brighter than at present, which it would be well to make an end of this very day? Can you say: “Even though I do not return home to-night, or ever again, but am smashed by a railway locomotive, or driven over by a ’bus, or poisoned in a cab, yet there will be nothing of mine, nothing when my friends take stock of my personal effects, of which I need be ashamed.” If so, thou art a good man indeed—or one of exceeding prudence. Above all things, my friends, be good, for that is best; but if not, at least be prudent. Let your memories be sullied with no stain, at all events, in the thoughts of those you leave at home. The actions of the unjust blossom in their dust into flowers compared with which the deadly nightshade is as the violet or the rose. The satirist tells us that in a week, a month, a year at most, the memory of a dead man dies even from the hearts of those he held most dear. This is not true; but the satirist would have been severer yet, and have spoken truth as well, had he said that the memory of a dead man, so far as his vice and wickedness are concerned, dies not at all among his kin. It is spoken of in whispers by the purest, and renders them less pure; it is made light of by the vicious, but only to excuse their wrongful acts by a worse example. “Wild as I may be, I am not so wild as the governor was in his day,” is a terrible legacy of comfort to leave behind one to one’s son.

It is possible that even Sir Massingberd Heath

may at some far-back time have deemed it necessary to lay to his soul some flattering unction of this kind. There were Sir Wentworth and Sir Nicholas, and many a Heath to extenuate his acts, if bad example might do it. But the time came to him, and very early in life, when he had no longer this slender justification, since he had outdone his worse progenitor in vice and folly. Mr. Clint had known, Mr. Long had guessed—we all of us had suspected more or less that the lost baronet's life had been evil beyond that of an ordinary man; but the dumb revelations which were made concerning it in the necessary examination of his papers, were simply shocking. After destroying these, the next approach to cleansing Fairburn Hall was to discharge all the indoor domestics. Mr. Richard Gilmore resented this conduct towards a faithful servant of the family, as he styled himself, very bitterly; but he departed with the rest, laden, there is little doubt, with a very considerable plunder. Presently the upholsterers came down from town with a great following of work-people, and a caravan of waggons, bearing costly furniture; then a host of servants, selected with as much care as was possible, replaced the exiles; and when all was ready within and without—the waste places of the grounds being reclaimed, and put upon the same footing with those which hitherto had alone been “kept up”—Sir Marmaduke Heath and his wife themselves took possession of Fairburn Hall.

Art had already done much to change that sombre house into a comfortable as well as splendid mansion; but the presence of its new mistress did more than all to rescue it from the long tyranny of decay and

gloom. Beneath her smile, the shadows of the past could take no shape, but vanished, thin and pale. She would allow them nowhere resting-place. Where they had been wont to gather thickest to her husband's eyes, she quelled them by her radiant presence, day and night. The Oak Parlour and its adjoining bedroom she formed into a double boudoir for her own sweet self; and straightway all bat-winged, harpy-headed memories, the brood of evil deeds, flew from it as the skirts of Night before the dawn, and in their place an angel-throng came fluttering in, and made it their abode. No stage-fairy, wand in hand, ever effected transformation-scene more charming and complete. One fear, and one alone, now agitated Marmaduke's heart, for the safety of his priceless wife in her approaching trial. He would have gladly cancelled nature's gracious promise, and lived childless all his days, rather than any risk should befall Lucy. His friends, his servants, and the villagers, brimful of hope that there should be an heir to Fairburn, flowed over in earnest congratulations; but for his part, he felt apprehensive only. His heart experienced no yearning for the child who might endanger the mother.

In accordance with her plan of ignoring all that had gone before of shame and sorrow, and regenerating evil places with a baptism of joy, Lady Heath had chosen the state chamber itself as her sleeping apartment, and there, in due time, she safely brought forth a son. Upon his knees, Marmaduke thanked Heaven for the blessing which was thus vouchsafed to him, but above all, in that it had brought with it no curse. Verily had the house of mourning become

the house of feasting, and the chamber of sorrow the chamber of mirth.

The unconscious father had been sitting by the library fire, endeavouring vainly to distract his mind from what was occurring upstairs, and turning his eyes restlessly ever and anon towards the door, when the voice of Dr. Sitwell suddenly broke the silence.

"Sir Marmaduke, I congratulate you; you have a son and heir."

"And my wife?" cried the husband, impatiently.

"She is as well as can possibly be expected, I do assure you."

"You are very welcome," exclaimed the young baronet; "and would have been so, although you had chosen to burst your way in with a torpedo. But I confess you startled me a good deal."

"I am afraid I did," returned the doctor, in a voice like a stream of milk and honey, "although it was not my intention to do so. But the fact is, I did not come in by the door at all. Her ladyship desired that I should bring you the good news by way of Jacob's Ladder; and I may add, that you may come back with me that way and see her yourself for just one quarter of a minute."

So even Jacob's Ladder was made a pleasant thoroughfare to Marmaduke, and dearer from that hour than all staircases of wood or stone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOUND.

Now, when Marmaduke junior, who was named also Peter, to mark the regard which both its parents had for my poor self, became of the ripe age of fourteen weeks or so, and the spring had so far advanced upon the summer as to admit of open-air rejoicings, it was determined that the advent of the heir of Fairburn should be celebrated with all due honour. This would have been done before, for Lady Heath had soon recovered her strength, and the child was reported to be a miracle of health and plumpness, had it not been for the backwardness of the season. The Hall had, of course, made merry upon the matter long ago; and if all the poor in the place had not done so, it was from no want of materials in the way of creature-comfort supplied by the young Squire. But what Marmaduke had waited for was settled fine weather, in order that the Chase might be filled by merry-makers, whose happiness should cleanse it from all memories of woe and wrong. Much of these, it is true, had been effaced already; a portion of the Park had been given up to the villagers for cricket and other sports—a grant common enough now, but one almost unexampled in those days—and the right of way, which Sir Massingberd had spent so many hundreds in opposing, had been voluntarily sur-

rendered. Oliver Bradford still retained his office, but being almost bedridden, inspired less terror than of yore among evil-doers; this was not so much to be regretted, however, since there was now little want, and therefore few poachers in Fairburn, while the general popularity of the young Squire lessened even those. I am afraid that if the new owner had heard a gun discharged at night in the Home Spinney itself, it is doubtful whether he would have laid down his book, or hesitated more than usual in his vain attempt to checkmate his wife at chess, in order to listen for the second barrel. The terror of the Lost Baronet had long been fading from his old domain, and upon this occasion, when old and young were all invited to make holiday in those once almost unknown retreats of hare and deer, there was no urchin but was determined—by no means single-handed, however—to explore them thoroughly. The very Wolsey Oak, which the ravens had made their quarters, was not shunned, but in the great space about it races were run, and dances danced, and its vast trunk was made the very head-quarters of childish merriment. These young folks did not affect the company of their elders, except when the gongs gave signal from the various marquees that there was food afoot, when they flocked to meet their parents at the heaped-up boards with a dutiful celerity. The higher class of tenantry were upon the lawn, and among them mixed with stately condescension a goodly number of the county aristocracy. I remember that some of the latter introduced upon this occasion the new dance called the quadrille, which had just arrived from Paris at that time. It had

come over in the bad company of the waltz ; but that lively measure was held to be too indecorous to be imported to Fairburn under its new *régime*. Everybody, when out of earshot of the host and hostess, was talking about the change that had taken place in this respect.

“How odd this all seems!” quoth Squire Broadacres to his neighbour, Mr. Flinthert, heir of the late lamented admiral. “None of *us*, I suppose, have been at the Hall here for this quarter of a century.”

“Ay, that at least,” quoth the other. “Of course, it is a great matter to see people in the Heaths’ position properly conducted as to morals; but I doubt whether this young fellow may not go astray in another and even a still more dangerous direction. They say his politics are, dear me, shocking.”

“Not a bit of it,” replied Mr. Broadacres. “It isn’t in the Heath blood to be radical ; but his wife, she rules the roast, you see; and a devilish pretty woman too; I could find it in my heart to forgive her anything.”

“But that fellow, Harvey Gerard, her father—why, he’s a downright *sans-culotte*, sir.” -

“The Gerards are bound to be, my dear sir,” returned the jolly squire. “All these things are a question of family; it’s nothing but that. I am told there is some French blood in him.”

“We want nothing of that sort down in Midshire,” responded Mr. Flinthert, shaking his head.

“But we have got it, you see, my friend, and therefore we must make the best of it. It was all very well to ignore Gerard while he was a new-comer at the Dovecot, although, mind you, he was always a

gentleman, every inch of him, notwithstanding his queer opinions; but now that he is become so nearly connected with Sir Marmaduke, and living at the Hall half his time, why, the county must make up its mind to receive him."

"I shall let him perceive, however, that it does so—so far, at least, as I am concerned—upon sufferance, and, as it were—what is the word?—ay, vicariously."

"Very good," observed Mr. Broadacres, dryly. "I am not quite clear as to your meaning; but if you intend to put Harvey Gerard down, I do not think you will meet with any very triumphant success. Why, Sir Massingberd here, who would have grappled with the devil, was tripped up and thrown by this man with the greatest ease."

"Nevertheless, I shall give him the cold shoulder," observed Mr. Flinthert, stiffly; "although I shall studiously avoid being rude."

"Faith, I would recommend your doing that, my friend," laughed the jolly squire. "If you turned your back upon Harvey Gerard, instead of your shoulder, my belief is that he'd kick you."

"That he'd do what?" exclaimed Mr. Barnardistone Flinthert, late high-sheriff and present magistrate and *custos rotulorum* of Midshire.

"That he'd take advantage of the opportunity, that's all," returned Mr. Broadacres, quietly. "No, no, sir, with a man like Gerard, all good Tories should keep on good terms. One can't hang him, you know, like a radical tailor, and therefore it's quite worth while to make ourselves appear to the best advantage. A stupid slight to a clever man

has often done more harm to the cause of good government than a whole regiment of dragoons can remedy."

"Oh, curse his cleverness!" responded Mr. Flint-hert, savagely. "I'm for no such milk-and-water measures. I think it's the duty of somebody to tell young Marmaduke——"

"Well, say it *yourself*," interrupted Mr. Broad-acres.

"It's a positive duty, I say, that somebody should go to the baronet, and tell him frankly that all this leniency to poaching fellows, and liberty to the rabble, cannot but lead to harm. 'You're a young man,' he should be told, 'and don't understand these things; but that is the opinion of the county, and it behoves you to know it.'"

"That would do more harm than good, Mr. Flint-hert. You may depend upon it that Marmaduke Heath thinks for himself in these matters, notwithstanding that I dare say Gerard and his pretty daughter have had some influence. The young fellow naturally goes exactly counter to all that his uncle did before him. This holiday-making and mixture of high and low here, are themselves enough to make Sir Massingberd turn in his grave."

"Ay, if he is in his grave," responded Mr. Flint-hert, darkly. "But who knows whether he may not turn up some day after all; tell me that."

"I can't tell you that," responded Mr. Broadacres; "but I'll bet you ten guineas to one that he never does."

"Ay, but if he did!" replied the other, gloomily. "If he was to appear this very day, for instance,

what a scene it would be—what a revolution for some people!”

“Well, if he did, he’d find the property greatly improved—except that that right of way has been reopened through the Park; all his thieving servants dismissed; all his debts settled; and his mad gipsy wife amply provided for, and well content, I am told, among her vagabond friends.”

Conversations somewhat similar to the above were being held all over the lawn, for its denizens were not, like the lower classes, so bent upon mere physical enjoyment as to be dead to the delights of scandal. But when the great bell rang for their afternoon repast, which was to be partaken of in one enormous tent, and at one gigantic table, the upper part of which was reserved for the gentlefolks, such talk was hushed, of course, and congratulations of host and hostess and the infant heir was the only wear for every countenance. Not a word about the uncertainty of Sir Marmaduke’s tenure of Fairburn was whispered over the good cheer, or a suggestion hazarded regarding the last proprietor’s possible reappearance. Far less, we may be certain, was any hint at such matters let fall when the health of the future Sir Peter—two generations from Somebody, and not to be associated with him upon any account—was proposed by Mr. Broadacres, and drunk with a genuine enthusiasm that brought the tears into his mother’s eyes, who with many a fair county dame graced the banquet as spectators. Then Mr. Long rose up and spoke of Marmaduke as one whom he had known and loved from his youth up, and the cheering rose tumultuous (but especially at the

tenants' table, because they knew him best), and was heard afar by the peasantry who were dining likewise elsewhere, and who joined in it uproariously, although they had already paid due honours to their lord ; so that all the Park was filled with clamour. To both these toasts, Sir Marmaduke, aglow with happiness and excitement, the handsomest man by far in that great company, with a grateful smile upon his student lips, gave eloquent response.

But when Lucy's health was proposed by Mr. Arabel, who dwelt, in homely, but fitting terms, upon her total lack of pride, her kindness to all that needed help, her beauty, which was sunshine to them all, then the young Squire lost his self-command. He rose to speak with evident embarrassment ; he saw herself before him, watching him with eyes that had plenty of pride for *him* in them, and listening for his words as though his tongue dropped jewels ; he knew that he could not contradict one word of praise that had been showered upon her, he could not mitigate in modesty a single phrase of her eulogium, because it was all true, and none but he knew how much more she was deserving of. While he stood there silent for a moment, but radiant with lips just parting for his opening sentence, there was a commotion at the far end of the tent. With that mysterious swiftness wherewith ill news pervades the minds of men, all knew at once some terrible occurrence had taken place. Several of the tenants rose, as if to intercept some person coming up towards the upper table, but others cried, "Go on, it must be told." For an instant, Lucy's glance flashed round to see that her child was safe in its nurse's arms,

then made her way swiftly and silently to her husband's side. Before she reached it, before the man who bore the tidings could get nearly so far, the whisper had gone round, "Sir Massingberd is found."

I shall never forget Marmaduke's face when he heard those words: his colour fled, his eyes wandered timidly hither and thither, his lips moved, but no sound came from them. At the touch of his wife's hand upon his arm, however, a new life seemed to be instilled into him, and as a village boy came forward bearing a rusty something in his hand, he stretched his hand out for it, murmuring, "What is this? Why do you bring this to me?" The boy was bashful, and gave no answer; but Farmer Arabel stepped forward very gravely, and spoke as follows:—

"Why, Mr. Marmaduke, you see," he said, unconsciously reserving the title for the man he had in his mind, "that is the life-preserver Sir Massingberd always went about with in his woods at night; I know it by the iron ring by which a leathern strap fastened it round his wrist. Where did you find it, eh, boy?"

"Well, sir, we was a-playing at Hide—me and Bill Jervis, and Harry Jones, and a lot of us—and the Wolsey Oak was Home. So while it was the other side's turn to hide, and we was waiting for them to cry 'Whoop,' we began to knife the tree a bit, to pass the time; and digging away at the bottom of the trunk, we made a hole, and presently came upon the head of this thing here, and dragged it out. Then we made a bigger hole, and please, sir, there was great big bones, and we couldn't pull them

through. Then we was frightened, and called to Jem Meyrick, the keeper, as was in the booth close by ; and he climbed up to the fork of the tree, and cried out that the Wolsey Oak was hollow, and there was a skeleton in it, standing up ; and they do say as it's Sir Massingberd."

While the boy was yet speaking a knot of men came slowly up from the direction of the Oak, bearing something among them, and followed at a little distance by a vast crowd, all keeping an awful silence. When they got near the opening of the tent, they set their ghastly burden down upon the lawn ; and we all went forth to look at it, including Marmaduke himself, with a face as pale as ashes, and clutching Lucy by the hand, as though he feared some power was about to tear her from him. I heard her whisper to him, " This may not be Lost Sir Massingberd after all."

Dr. Sitwell heard her also, and at once officiously replied, " Oh, but it is, my lady ; there has no man died in Fairburn for these thirty years, except the late baronet, who could have owned those bones. I will pledge my professional reputation that yonder man, when clothed in flesh and blood, was six feet four. What a large skull, and what gigantic thigh bones ! "

" Ay," quoth Mr. Remnant, the general dealer, who was kneeling down beside the skeleton and examining it with minuteness, as though it had been offered to him for sale. " Here is something hard and dry, with iron nails upon it, which was once a shooting-shoe, one of a pair, or I am much mistaken, which I sold to Sir Massingberd myself."

"And here," quoth Jem Meyrick, stepping forward, "is summat as I think must have been the Squire's great gold chain, which I found at the bottom of the trunk. The Wolsey Oak is quite hollow, Sir Marmaduke, although none of us knew it. It is my belief that Sir Massingberd must have climbed up into the fork to look about him, for he seemed to be expecting poachers on that night ; and that the rotten wood gave way beneath him, and let him down feet foremost into the trunk."

Without doubt, this was the true explanation of the matter. The skeleton was found with the arms above the head, a position which had precluded self-extrication; although it was evident that the wretched man had made great efforts to escape from his living tomb, since what remained of the shoe of the right foot was much turned up, and retained deep marks of the pressure of the buckle. As I looked at these relics of humanity, the gipsy's curse recurred to my mind with dreadful distinctness : "*May he perish, inch by inch, within reach of the aid that shall never come, ere the God of the poor take him into His hand.*"

It was a singular feature in the case, and one which was of course made to point its moral among the villagers, that had Sir Massingberd not closed the Park, and refused the right of way, he could scarcely have thus miserably perished; since the foot-path, as I have said, absolutely skirted the tree in question, and people would have passed close by it at all hours. It reminded me of the evil fate of James I. of Scotland, who might have escaped his murderers in the Blackfriar's Abbey at Perth, but for the simple fact that he had caused the mouth of a certain

vault to be bricked up, because his tennis-balls were wont to roll through it. How long the wretched Squire had suffered before Death released him from his fangs, it was impossible to guess; or whether that terrible cry heard by Dick Westlock that same night, and by myself next morning, was indeed from the throat of Sir Massingberd in his agony.

We were the two persons who had been nearest to the Wolsey Oak, between the period of his entombment and the search instituted throughout the Chase. He must have been dead before *that*, for the seekers passed close beside the tree without the least suspicion of the ghastly Thing it held; unless, indeed, he had heard our voices, but, choked by that time by the falling dry-rot, was unable to reply. No wonder the ravens had sought the Wolsey Oak, and croaked forth Doom therefrom so long.

CHAPTER XXXV.

L'ENVOI.

WEEKS elapsed before Marmaduke Heath recovered from the shock of this discovery, but when he once began to do so, he grew up to be quite another man in body and mind.

It was only by this change, when we saw him so strong and cheerful, that we got to estimate how powerful had been that sombre influence which had so long overshadowed him, and what great exertion it must have cost him to let it appear to us so little. The uncertainty of his tenure in Fairburn Hall had secretly affected him very deeply, in spite of the wand of the good fairy. He went to France for a little trip with his father-in-law for a thorough change, and there it was he had that duel thrust upon him of which we have incidentally made mention. Let us not judge him harshly in that matter, for men of his day were as wanting in moral courage as they were ignorant of physical fear. Yet what a risk—ay, and what a selfish risk—he ran therein, let alone the unchristian wickedness of that wicked adventure.

He never dared to reveal to Lucy what he had done, but he confessed it to Harvey Gerard, who rebuked him roundly for the crime; observing, how-

ever, to myself, not without some pride, that he had always averred Marmaduke was a fine fellow, and entertained a proper contempt for all bullies and scoundrels. The young baronet acted weakly, doubtless, but the duellist's blood was surely upon his own head. At all events that was the view Marmaduke himself took of the matter, and there was now not a happier man in all Midshire than he; discharging the duties of his rank and position in a manner that won the applause of all his neighbours, sooner or later, although Mr. Flinthert's applause came very late indeed.

Year after year, I was a frequent guest at Fairburn Hall, and never set foot in a house with inmates more blessed in one another. Year by year, Lucy seemed to grow in goodness, and even, as it seemed to me, in beauty. I saw her last with silver hair crowning her still unwrinkled brow; and since that day no fairer sight has met these failing eyes.

Death has long released the noble soul of Harvey Gerard, but his name is borne not unworthily by a grandson as fearless as himself, and after it the hard-won letters V C. In a sunny spot in the little church-yard at Fairburn lies my dear old tutor—far from the iron rails which enclose the bones of the long missing baronet.

Sir Peter— But why should I further speak of death, and make parade of loss and change?—an old man like me should, having told his tale, be silent, and not court stranger ears to “gain the praise that comes to constancy.”

The last time I saw Fairburn, it lay in sunshine. There was no trace of that bad man whose deeds once

overshadowed it, save that in one great space, close to the public footway through the park, there was a vast bare ring, where grass, it was said, had never grown although the Wolsey Oak, which had once stood above it, had been cut down for forty years and more.

The place was cursed, so village gossip told, by Lost Sir Massingberd. This may be true or not. My tale itself may lie open to suspicion of untruth, and this and that, which have been therein narrated have already been pronounced "improbable," "impossible," "absurd." To critics of this sort, I have only to express my regret that the mission of the author has in my case been reversed, and facts have fallen into such clumsy hands as to seem fiction.

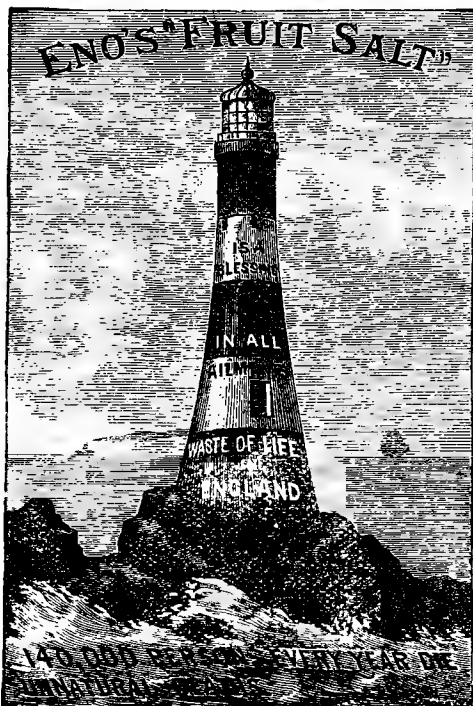
Let me add one extract from the works of an author popular in my young days, but now much oftener quoted than perused. He is describing a picture sale attended by the *dilettanti*. A carking *connoisseur* is abusing some effort of an unhappy artist to portray nature. "This fellow," cries he, "has even had the audacity to attempt to paint a fly! That a fly, forsooth!" and he flips at it with contemptuous fingers.

The fly flew away. *It was a real one!*

THE END.

WAR!!!

WHAT IS MORE TERRIBLE THAN WAR?



O world!
O men! what are ye, and our best
designs,
That we must work by crime to punish
crime,
And slay, as if death had but this one
gate.—BYRON.

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PASS IT BY IF YOU LIKE,

BUT IT IS TRUE!

WHAT MIND CAN GRASP
THE LOSS TO MAN-

KIND and the misery entailed that these figures reveal? What dashes to the earth so many hopes, breaks so

many sweet alliances, blasts so many auspicious enterprises, as untimely death! to say nothing of the immense increase of rates and taxes arising from the loss of the bread-winners of families.

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